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On the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary of Kierkegaard's Birth

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PREFACE

The texts published in the present issue were written in celebration of Søren Kierkegaard's 200th birthday for the conference *The Existential Interpretation of Being Human in Philosophy and Psychology: Validity and Topicality* (October 3–6, 2013, Vilnius) organized by *The Center for Philosophical Anthropology* at the European Humanities University (Vilnius), *The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre* (Copenhagen), and the *Center for Religious Studies and Research* at Vilnius University.

As the intellectual history of the recent hundred years shows, Kierkegaard has proved to be such a remarkable – such a genius – thinker whose ideas have become requested and intensively discussed regardless of all the changes in the *Zeitgeist* and in the intellectual mode. That is why the interpretation of Kierkegaard's contribution to the European intellectual tradition is no longer framed in terms of his identification as "the forerunner of existentialism". Rather we have to assume that the scope of the ideas and questions he was concerned with is relevant to the very core – a deeply problematic core – of the project called modernity (in all its historical/rhetorical variations: classical modernity, late modernity, post-modernity and so on).

The conference was focused on the programmatic concept of Kierkegaard's thinking – the concept of *existence*. It is undoubtedly the very remarkable concept since it has remained persistent after the long-term and profound criticism of concepts such as "the subject" and "humanism". At the same time, it is not at all self-evident to what extent and for what reasons the existential interpretation of being human is valid and topical *today*. Rather, it could be said that various challenges of contemporary world require reconsideration and, probably, re-actualization of the existential approach. In this regard, it seems very important that the conference was conceived as a cooperation of philosophers and psychologists including (what is no less important) practicing psychologists.

In this issue, all contributions are divided into four rubrics: (1) *Kierkegaard's Authorship and Reconsideration of the Concept of Subject*, (2) *Existence and/as the Religious*, (3) *From Self to the Other(s)*, (4) *Single Individual and/in Therapy* – which reflect the general thematic priorities of the conference discussions. At the same time, there are many significant and theoretically inspiring correlations as well as intriguing tensions between the texts published in different rubrics. Hopefully, such a polyphony has something in common with the existential heuristics of Kierkegaard's thinking and communicates to some extent a vivid spirit of the conference.

Tatiana Shchyttsova

WHAT IS 'AN EXISTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION'?[1]

Edward F. Mooney[2]

Abstract

What does Kierkegaard – or his pseudonym Johannes Climacus – mean when he announces, in the *Postscript's* subtitle, that the book will provide "an Existential Contribution"? The varied history of 'existential philosophy' no doubt erupts from this casual end to a subtitle. Rather than look at the contents of Kierkegaard's books for an answer, I look at their strange and unsettling titles, subtitles, and author-attributions. They give important evidence for my claim that an existential contribution is a Socratic contribution. The contents of these books arrive in distinctive 'wrappings' that foreshadow and effect a subtle Socratic, existential contribution.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Socrates, Existential Contributions, Existential Resolutions, Unsettled Identities, Kierkegaard's Book Titles, Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard lives on as a figure with a biography that gets retold generation-to-generation. He also lives on as a shadow behind an impressive sequence of books that get studied generation-to-generation. What sorts of books did he write? What sort of writer was he?

For answers, a biographical snapshot gives little help. After completing an apprenticeship at the university, Kierkegaard didn't become a parson, professor, or lawyer – an editor, journalist, or dramatist. He wrote from none of these social positions. Of course he became a writer of books that over time have gathered a devoted following. But what *kind* of writer was he? The pseudonym Kierkegaard dubs as author of *Fear and Trembling,* Johannes *de silentio*, calls himself a "freelancer." But what, exactly, is *that* – other than a writer who is unwilling, or unable, to be tied down as a dramatist, novelist, poet, or critic? He completed a successful university apprenticeship, earning the equivalent of a modern Ph. D., and might have become a professor knows for his academic philosophical or theological tracts. But Kierkegaard

[1] An early version of this essay will appear in *Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts*, ed. E. Ziolkowski, Cambridge (forthcoming).

[2] Edward F. Mooney is past President of the Kierkegaard Society of North America, retired from the Departments of Religion and Philosophy, Syracuse University, and visiting Professor at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Fields of interest: Kierkegaard, Thoreau.

never put his training to work in a recognized trade or career. To call him ‘a writer’ does little to tie down what *sort* of books he wrote.

I. What *sort* of writer, what *sort* of books?

What *kind* of book do we handle when we pick up one of his volumes? Can we tell from the cover whether we're handling poetry or literature, philosophy or theology, or something else that defies our usual cubbyholes for classifying books? Some titles look more philosophical – *Philosophical Crumbs*, *The Concept of Irony* – some more theological – *Works of Love*, "The Changelessness of God". But many are just baffling – *Either/Or*, *Prefaces*, *Repetition*.

Setting the theological aside, we might try to decide if Kierkegaard is a kind of philosophical poet, perhaps "a kind of poet." Of course, he's not a straightforward poet, someone who writes only poetry; and he has too much literature or poetry in his productions to be an out-and-out straightforward philosopher. If we shelve him with the philosophers, it would be with Montaigne or Nietzsche rather than Descartes or Hume. Calling him ‘a kind of poet’ (as well as ‘a kind of philosopher’ lets him be figurative, evocative, allusive, elusive, and enigmatic in a way denied to a standard essayist or philosopher.[3]

Why value the "evocative, allusive, elusive" in a thinker? Well, a thinker might envy the poet's freedom, a freedom that comes with release from the demands of strict philosophical categories and a consequent permission to explore the unknown in a carefree way, with imagination and passions given plenty of leeway. On the other hand, a thinker might *resent* the poet's careless way with cultural requirements of discipline and order. Plato warned against this hybrid – thinking as a kind of poetry or theater. Famously, he banishes poets from the state ordered by philosophy. Or so it *seems*: he did not rule out of order his *own* poetry, and Socrates, in his way, is certainly "evocative, allusive, elusive." Logical Positivists wanted to exile nonsense, and that nonsense included all that we call "poetry." For them, a poetic philosopher was an oxymoron. Nietzsche's aspiration to be a "Music Playing Socrates" is just unphilosophical madness.[4]

Jamie Ferreira finds two writers who *prefer* a volatile mix, and she cites them to introduce Kierkegaard. Robert Frost declares, "*a poetic philosopher or a philosophical poet are my favorite kind of both.*" And then she cites Wittgenstein: "*philosophy ought only to be written as a po-*

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3 Henry David Thoreau has a capacious sense of "the poetic." He writes: "Yet poetry, though the last and finest result, is a natural fruit. As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem, either spoken or done" (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. C.F. Hovde, W.L. Howarth, and E.H. Witherell, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1980, 91). Kierkegaard balks at a general endorsement of "poetic living" for fear it would endorse the life only of the aesthete or dandy.

4 See F. Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, transl. D. Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, 85; 93 (sections 15 and 17).

etic composition."[5] If poetry loosens philosophy that's too straight-laced, philosophy can tighten the focus of poetry toward the systematic and orderly. The disruption of expectations that occurs when philosophy and poetry dance together can be disastrous, but it can also be delightfully revealing. Border-crossing and – erasing can expose important truths as well as instill anxiety.

II. A Socratic, existential contribution

I want to argue that Kierkegaard was a Socratic writer who wrote Socratic books. It's in that light that I want to interpret his enigmatic claim that makes "an existential contribution." The term "an existential contribution" is the final cadence in the mocking title and sub-title of his great *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In case we've forgotten, the full title is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs: a Mimic-pathetic-dialectical disquisition – an Existential Contribution*. There is both philosophy and a poetic wit in play here, both seriousness and irony not to mention comedy. We've asked what makes something "an existential contribution." We'll proceed toward an answer. But it's worth noting that this is the first time in the Western philosophical canon – so far as I know – that an action or gesture is called 'existential.' Sartre and Jaspers will build on this seed, dropped by one Johannes Climacus almost offhandedly in Denmark in 1851.

With Climacus in particular and Kierkegaard more generally we have Socratic writing – so I claim. And a Socratic writer makes an 'existential contribution.' Johannes Climacus, as a Socratic writer promises to make things difficult. When life is leveled out, smoothly unproblematic, *comme il faute*, we need a Socrates or Climacus to raise problems – questions that may well outstrip answers, dilemmas we might call "existential." This is the existential contribution Climacus or Socrates might make. So we have a tentative answer to our original query. What kind of writer is Kierkegaard? He's a Socratic writer. And what is the mark of a Socratic writer? It's one who makes an existential contribution.

III. Trouble-making misfits

The most natural way to unravel what an existential contribution might be is to look at the contents of *Concluding Postscript*, and of some other of the impressive sequence of books he produced rapid fire over a decade. But there is another quite illuminating alternative, one that has received little notice. Rather than seek evidence in the insides of the books for Kierkegaard being a Socratic writer who makes an existential contribution, I want to start with the outsides, with the covers of the books – with their wrapping, or packaging. Rather than crack the book

5 J.M. Ferreira: *Kierkegaard*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2009, 1.

open, I want to look at titles and subtitles, attributed authors or pseudonyms, the tactile heft of the books (or lack of it).[6]

A 'book' titled *Prefaces* that contains nothing but prefaces is not poetry or short story or political polemic. Odd creatures like *Prefaces*, *Either/Or*, and *Postscript* are full of brilliant writing bent on breaking up literary cubbyholes. They are Socratic irritants that can teach us Socratic ignorance, bafflement viscerally conveyed in a mix of annoyance, helplessness, and allure. Socrates' interlocutors are left puzzling over missing definitions.

Kierkegaard's readers are left puzzling over texts that are missing their identifying labels and purposes. The job of sorting new arrivals for the library shelves was to have been simple and straightforward. With Kierkegaard's texts, it's not at all simple or straightforward. But how did I come to expect that all proper books have proper places, simple niches, on my shelves? Perhaps I expect too much order from the world, or the wrong *kind* of order.

Books that are evasive about their genre can be evasive about their authorship. Neither *Prefaces* nor *Either/Or* has a straightforward author. They are pseudonymous: we both do and do not know who authors them. Is *Middlemarch* to be filed under George Eliot or Mary Anne Evans? Evans used a pseudonym so her work would be taken seriously. Kierkegaard used pseudonyms for less evident reasons.

One might see pseudonyms alternately as fluffy devices to provoke public interest, as suspect means to deflect personal responsibility for opinions or positions, or as tools to incite Socratic self-awareness and interpretative alertness. And apart from the motivations for using pseudonyms, there remains the issue of *power*. Can "Kierkegaard" overrule the claims to authorship made by Climacus, Johannes *de silentio*, or Nicholas Note Bene?[7]

If you wanted to shelve by genre, would the books end up under literature, philosophy, essays, or personal meditations? Perhaps (heaven forbid!) Kierkegaard is just "playing around" as an afternoon's amusement. He says that his *Prefaces* are "like tuning a guitar, like chatting with a child, like spitting out a window".[8] But I suspect he is pulling our leg. After all, we might equally think that the *Postscript* or *Fear and Trembling* weren't entirely serious, were like "tuning a guitar." In fact, an early section of *Fear and Trembling* is called – exactly – "attunement." His feints, his intimating that it is all a joke, provoke our anxious parries.

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6 Kelly Jolley reports, tongue in cheek, that all he wants is "the box the world's delivered in." Ultimately, we want what's inside Kierkegaard's books. But the boxes deserve study not just for what they contain but for what they are in the own right.

7 Others in this gallery of pseudonyms include Victor Eremita, Constantine Constantius, Vigilius Haufniensis, and Anti-Climacus. See the discussion in Edward F. Mooney: Pseudonyms and Style, in: *Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. J. Lippitt and G. Pattison, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, chap. 10.

8 S. Kierkegaard: *Prefaces*, transl. T. Nichol, Princeton 1997, 5.

He calls *Prefaces* the work of "a light-hearted ne'er-do-well".[9] But that's just flippant, a wisecrack.

Fear and Trembling is perhaps Kierkegaard's best-known book. We think of Abraham bringing his son to Mt. Moriah. Kierkegaard must be defending Abraham's shocking and even servile compliance. But why assume this book is out to make a case for Abraham (or against him)? Does it *look* like a book with a thesis to defend? The first part looks like a set of fables or mood-swings and nightmarish dreams, and the second, like logical machinations of a deluded scholastic.[10] Well, if it is not *that* disjointed, perhaps it is another hybrid, defined apophatically by what it is *not*: *neither* essay *nor* fable, *nor* sermon *nor* poem, *nor* polemic... but just possibly, a dash of each of these in a strange stew.

Kierkegaard calls the "book" a "dialectical lyric," which is a stab at two of its stylistic features. But it is also pure unprecedented invention, a collage of fable, biblical exegesis, social commentary, dialectical investigation of concepts (like 'the ethical,' or 'the tragic,') and barely concealed farce. It is burlesque, or what Bakhtin calls "the carnivalesque."[11]

Kierkegaard is a *literary* genius as well as being an astute philosopher, a withering social critic, and a profound diagnostician of the soul. He endlessly invents counter-genres, para-books, unclassifiable publications that question our sense of various forms a piece of writing can take. He gives us the vertiginous sense that there may be *no end* to such inventiveness – that under his spell, we live and read in infinite possibility.

IV. What is a postscript?

Like *Prefaces*, the title, *Postscript,* names a *section* of a book's interior, and can only anomalously fit as a title. Why do we divide interiors into prefaces, acknowledgments, chapters, postscripts, indexes, and so forth? If Kierkegaard gives us *Prefaces* or *Postscript* will the next book be *Footnotes? Or Epigraphs,* or *Dedications*? Note that this nearly 600 page tome dwarfs the slim volume to which it is an appendage.

The slim parent-book is *Philosophical Crumbs, or a Crumb of Philosophy*. What is it to publish philosophical *crumbs*,[12] trifles, or crumbling remains, especially in an age of philosophical structures and systems? The full title utterly dwarfs the shorthand, "Postscript": *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to *Philosophical Crumbs: A Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation – an Existential Contribution*. Open it, and we

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[9] Kierkegaard, op. cit., 6.

[10] Lengthy accounts of the enigmas of *Fear and Trembling* are given in Edward F. Mooney: *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, Albany: State University of New York 1991, and in idem, *On Søren Kierkegaard*.

[11] M. Bakhtin: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984. I do not want to invent or borrow a genre to cover Johannes *de silentio*'s creation. More important is to emphasize an author peddling strange goods that challenge what writing should look like.

[12] See n. 1 above.

discover what looks like a scholarly tome, full of sections and sub-sections, appearing systematic and self-important, hardly "mere crumbs" or "fragments." In his masterful biography, Alastair Hannay suggests, *Concluding Unscholarly Addendum.*[13]

However we render the title, Kierkegaard is bending literary expectations to a breaking point. Is this title (not to mention what follows) some sort of insider's joke?[14] *Kierkegaard insures – or hopes to insure – that if* we go on reading, we can't be blasé, as if canvassing this sort of thing is routine, an everyday encounter.

For many readers, I suspect, the shock of the title has ceased to make trouble. We dash on, ever eager to get to the business at hand: what positions are advanced or attacked, and with what arguments? Unfortunately, *Postscript* is not just about Q. E. D's. The heart of its mission is forecast in the rest of the title. What is a "*Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation – an Existential Contribution*"*?* (This doesn't sound like a promise of arguments.) A "postscript to crumbs of philosophy" seems troubling enough, and a "mimic-pathetic-dialectic compilation" only ups the ante. To mime or mimic is to engage in the comic, while to evoke pathos engages the tragic, and 'dialectic' brings philosophy on stage. What sort of book, or genre, lets tragedy, comedy, and philosophy play equal and simultaneous parts?

V. Not on the map

Thoreau and Nietzsche were unreservedly literary writers *and* philosophers. Kierkegaard is not alone in being both philosopher *and* literary figure, working out a collaborative, hyphenated cultural and personal identity, off the map of standard vocational cubbyholes. There is a tradition, as it were, of defying traditions.

Kierkegaard's Socratic, existential motivations *drive* him to defy classification. He artfully dodges our trapping moves. He has no wish that a *new* genre be inaugurated in his honor, and no wish to found a new philosophical style. To focus on classification – natural enough for orderly persons – distracts from our deeper needs and yearnings. Knowing where Kierkegaard belongs on philosophical or literary maps doesn't answer our existential anxieties about who we are and where we're going. The sub-title declares that the author makes an *existential* contribution. If we try to map his *oeuvre* onto larger cultural frameworks is an *objective* project, that is, a non-existential project.

The *Postscript*'s author contributes, if he does, by leading me away from classifications to the quality of my singular life, here and now, a

13 *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 315. It can be called an "unscholarly" postscript insofar as its content often satirizes academic treatises and scholarly frames of mind, not just "scientific thinking" of the sort done in science labs.

14 For every smitten disciple of Socrates there were plenty who thought he was "only a sophist" and still others who thought his tomfoolery was a threat to the state. Kierkegaard's disquieting challenge to expectations might me seen as a threat to the city's moral-religious fiber. It exposed too much.

life ready to be shaped, as I alone can shape it. Failing to settle objective matters of genre spins me out of objectivity toward *emptiness*. The books *refuse to tell me* which way to turn. I'm thrown into existential space wherein I anxiously realize that any resolution, any step forward, is a step taken *on my own*. As if to highlight this abandonment to our own devices, and the withdrawal of helping hands, in its final pages, *Postscript* invites me, to leave it, relinquish it, as if the 600 pages, like *Prefaces*, were the work of "a light-hearted do-nothing."[15] Like Socrates, the book stings and sings and departs.

Kierkegaard is attractive-unattractive, ordered-disordered, sober-comedic. He is an *enfant terrible*, a misfit who took pleasure in not fitting in, and was just as non-conformist when it came to the shape of his literary production. He does not trade in the common coin.[16]

If Kierkegaard eludes standard literary cubicles, he does no better when it comes to standard ways of writing philosophy. He can hold forth on subjectivity and objectivity, the individual and the crowd, the anguish of faith and the false assurance of careerism and church. But the faux-genres and non-genres that he adopts in delivering his insights are amusingly *bizarre*.

Kant gives us *The Critique of Pure Reason*, or *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*. Stiff, but familiar. Kierkegaard gives us, in contrast, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs:* a *Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation – an Existential Contribution* – authored by Johannes Climacus, with S. Kierkegaard responsible for publication. He won't settle into a literary, philosophical, or theological scene, nor into essays or poetry, novellas, treatises, or history. *These refusals have an existential rationale. They serve freedom and new life.* He creates *anxiety*, that forerunner to change of self, or recovery of soul.

To follow routine expectations is to idle one's freedom. We know from *The Concept of Anxiety* that freedom requires passage through "a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*".[17] The amorphous non-shapes of his literary products induce and replicate the anxiety that is part and parcel of freedom. (As Gordon Marino slyly dubs him,

15 The final unnumbered pages push the pseudonym aside: now, "S. Kierkegaard" claims to be the author of *Postscript*. All that has been written seems to be revoked, thrown away, like Wittgenstein's ladder. See my discussion "*Postscript*: Humor takes it back," in E.F. Mooney: *On Søren Kierkegaard,* Continuum, chap. 12.

16 Kierkegaard's appreciation of Mozart's Don Giovanni can count as an essay, even though it is folded into an unwieldy non-essay titled *Either/Or*, published under a pseudonym. His social analysis of nineteenth-century Copenhagen in *Two Ages* could also count as an essay. But these instances of straightforward "essay exposition" are rare in his oeuvre. George Steiner, a "man of letters," writes, as Kierkegaard might write, on love and desire, art and philosophy, mysticism and moral vision, self-deception, and goods. However, Kierkegaard would never be mistaken for a man of letters. Socially, he has no use for the literary clubs that could grant him the laurel, and second, he insists on irking his public, thus attracting (at least in his lifetime) *disapprobation*.

17 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Dread*, transl. W. Lowrie, Princeton 1944, 42.

Kierkegaard is "A Doctor of Dread."[18]) We undergo vertigo, mild or screaming. Of course the doctor has our deep yearnings, our true interests at heart. This is all a forerunner and companion to my freedom.

VI. Making an existential contribution

Postscript has a final tag in its subtitle. This "*Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation,*" we are told, is *"an Existential Contribution."* This is the first time in European philosophy, to my knowledge, that the adjective 'existential' is used to signify a concern for one's personal existence.

Kierkegaard wants his literary philosophy to address readers intimately, existentially, to call out from them their sense of the meanings and directions of their life. Persons have complex social identities, but that's not the end of the matter. One may be identified as a judge or an aesthete, a shopkeeper or a priest, an uncle, a hero, or a rogue. Kierkegaard's literary genius in its *first* phase is to give compelling portraits of social ways of being, as a public might construe and misconstrue them.

There are different ways to describe the role of a parson or professor. Kierkegaard critiques commonplace ways of taking these social identities, and he typically moves from social critique to diagnostics of the soul. Even as he provides provocative sketches of how a parson might appear on Sunday (for just one example), he moves simultaneously into more private landscapes of identity.

In a *second* phase, the question "How does *one, in general,* exist as a proper parson, or *typically* lose one's soul as a parson?" becomes quite another question. I now ask, "Have *I*, as a parson, lost my soul?" In this second phase of questioning, a general query about social identity gets transformed. I modulate the question, hearing it *existentially*, hearing it as addressing *me*, and requiring *my* answer or response (and general questions drop away).

How do we know if Climacus has fulfilled his promise to provide an 'existential contribution'? Well, has the register of my questioning shifted? I have to ask whether I have modulated from the excellent but non-intimate, objective question, "What is it to *exist* as a soul in love?" to another question that can be light years away. Do I find myself wandering toward the question "*Am I in love?*" If that modulation takes place, Johannes Climacus has pushed or pulled me to consider an identity *I might assume* that is deeper than an array of possible social identities, generally considered. *That* is his 'existential contribution.'

A judge may play out his courtroom role, making brilliant legal points (or being only banal and routine), performing (or not performing) his social role. We might ask, if he falters, if he has his heart in his work, has sold his soul to the devil, or finds anything august in the office he holds. But these are not yet existential questions. They are still evaluations of social identity.

18 See G. Marino: The Danish Doctor of Dread ("Opinionator"), *The New York Times*, 2012, March 17.

To perform a *role* adequately can require that one put one's heart into it. A Socratic existential contribution does not ask us to assess whether someone fulfills a social identity. Instead the Socratic contribution elicits *from someone particular, from this judge in question,* a *self-evaluation*. An existential intervention succeeds when *this very judge* is startled or unnerved or disquieted by the existential address of another, and is then moved to decisively resolve or close down a just-opened field of possibilities. *This very judge* decides to reform, or resign, or prefer to do nothing, and then cashes out the decision in action.[19]

Kierkegaard makes an existential contribution that only I can complete. *His* contribution is to offer me an existential space distinct from social space. If I accept this offer, I accept the open space where existential possibilities are vividly acknowledged, and then I *close* that radical openness through decisive resolution and action.

Kierkegaard can't complete the process he initiates, but we can make headway. He can offer possibilities, but he can't determine which of these will become mine. A contribution to charity is *realized* only when it is accepted, and Kierkegaard's existential contribution is *realized* only when I resolve first-personally to accept it by taking *this* step rather than *that*, to resolve my anomalous situation, *this* way rather than *that*. Accepting an existential contribution allows me to become who I *am* by allowing me to become who I *will* be.[20]

It is hard to grasp the uncanny *magnitude* of the *Postscript*'s intention. The comic, dialectic, and tragic are in the service of an infinite demand. It is a demand that can be fulfilled or rejected in any number of ways, and there are no guidelines included. So I can refuse the Climacus offer. I might be entertained by his comic wit, impressed by his dialectical finesse, or moved by the pathos of his descriptions. But his contribution is realized only if I am transformed, turned around. It is

19 I can bring out sub-phases within this phase of self-examination. I no longer focus on what someone in my circumstance does to achieve an identity – say, what a judge-to-be might generally do to become a judge. I focus on what *I alone* must do to achieve this identity, here and now. That can't be *merely* a matter of rote imitation, doing what is generally done in that role. I move to the brink of existential *commitment*, my own forging of what that role uniquely will be *for me*, and then make the resolutions and actions that secure (however precariously) that existential identity, *my* reality. I don't just 'play the role of a judge' but become one myself. I move to the brink of the pond, dive into the pond, and come up swimming (or not). At the brink I no longer attend to existential reality *in general*. Diving in means leaping from a pond's-edge *view* of what an existential reality requires (say, that I must choose myself, as every human must), to full immersion in another question. Who will *I, in particular*, be? And in the midst of immersion, I must settle the matter. Will I rise to the surface (or stay under longer, or forever)? Subsurface, how will I move, with what speed and to what end? Will I rise to the occasion to do what I must do to be the parson or judge that I must be? How, and with what style, and to what end?

20 See R. Pippin: On 'Becoming Who One Is' (and Failing): Proust's Problematic Selves, in: N. Kompridis: *Philosophical Romanticism*, London: Routledge 2006, 113–140.

realized only if I am undone and then do myself up again (or find myself graciously restored, and not reject *that*).

You might reasonably think that it is enough for a literary figure to make a significant contribution to the canon, or to stretch the canon, or to win acclaim in her age. You might think it enough for a philosopher to better understand a classical philosophical puzzle or text, or to win acclaim as a critic of arts or politics, gender relations, religious intolerance, or a critic of insensitivity to the natural world. But none of this, laudable as it is, would be enough for Socrates, or for Kierkegaard.

Socrates engaged in enigmatic, unfinished conversations. Kierkegaard writes enigmatic unfinished books. The aim is not to advance philosophy or literature as a discipline but to *existentially alter listeners and readers, one by one*. Each wants to make headway toward salvation of souls, or at least to remove vanities that obstruct making headway. Kierkegaard is the Socrates who "makes [those in his presence] ill at ease, and inflicts upon them the unpardonable offence of making them doubt themselves."[21] Kierkegaard writes late in life that his mission has always been Socratic. His pseudonymous authorship especially is an endlessly unsettling Socratic installation of self-doubt offered as a preliminary to self-transformation.

VII. Beyond cultural identity

Let me consider this indeterminacy of identity by reflecting on Henri Bergson in the last days of his life.[22] His life is not exactly a text, but he has an identity at stake, he lives out the inadequacy of social identity and the necessity of existential identity. The question he faces in his last days is not unlike the question facing Socrates in his last days in Athens, under trial and under arrest.

When Jews in Paris were required to wear yellow armbands after the Nazi takeover, Bergson was, perhaps, not *required* to identify himself as such, ethically or religiously or existentially. He was close to converting to Roman Catholicism, as his friends had known, years before the Nazi invasion. His world renown as a philosopher would have earned him the exemption from persecution offered to Freud, or negotiated by Wittgenstein for his sisters. (The Nazis were not entirely deaf, especially in the late 1930s, to the onus of appearing to be cultural barbarians.)

Yet Bergson, now a frail man in his eighties, chose to line up outside in a cold drizzle, wearing the armband marking his identification with the Jews who were already facing a horror that would only grow. *He de-*

21 See M. Merleau-Ponty: *In Praise of Philosophy*, transl. J. Wild and J.M. Edie, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1988, 31–39. Kelly Dean Jolley develops Merleau-Ponty's discussions of Bergson's decision to stand forth as a Jew, and links it to the Socratic nature of philosophy. I discovered his discussion while wrestling with these questions. A draft of his lecture is available at http://kellydeanjolley.com/2012/08/31/draft-of-mmp-talk/.

22 M. Merleau-Ponty: *In Praise of Philosophy*, 36, quoted in Jolley's lecture, p. 12.

termined his identity, an existential identity, at that moment, when his social identity was indeterminate.

As outsiders we could wonder whether Bergson fit into social reality as a Jew, as a world-famous intellectual, as a soon-to-be-Catholic convert, or as a frail old man. Of course he was all of these. But social identity merely poses the question of his existential identity. Bergson's final days bring into prominence the need for an *existential* determination: will he resolve to have it end this way or that, in keeping with *these* of his espoused values and commitments, or *those*? Will he skirt the tempting but ultimately self-betraying alternatives?

Kierkegaard's corpus stands to us roughly as Bergson's life does. We recognize that the corpus or the life could be focused this way or that. The big difference is that we can revel in the choice Bergson made. He lined up in a cold drizzle. For us, and for him, that *settles* which way to read his life. But the large Kierkegaard community has not yet resolved the field of possible interpretations of his works. We don't know how to *settle* the interpretative possibilities.

It is relatively easy to make the case that Bergson is a hero. Is it as easy to make the case that Kierkegaard is Socratic, and passes the existential task of response to *me*? Our reading of his corpus can have *this* sort of life, *this* sort of identity, rather than that. The focus is up to me (and to *you*). If I'm right, Kierkegaard intends to put the ball in my court. If I exercise only my scholarly resources in order to find his cultural niche that will silence his voice – his *Socratic* voice.

We might say,

> "Look, Bergson had a moment of existential anguish and thank God he came out of it a hero. *That's* what matters, not the array of possibilities that we see preceding his decision to walk into the rain and line up."

Likewise, we might say, scanning the possibilities for shelving Kierkegaard's texts, "Look, here I am in a moment of anguish, and thank God I now come out of it taking the author as a *serious*, *Socratic* philosopher – not as a perpetual adolescent misusing great talent, or simply a polemical anti-Hegelian." Thus I cease searching in the grid of objective possibilities for his literary-philosophic niche.

Kierkegaard enacts Socratic parries and feints, delivering texts that escape our nets. Slipping our nets is more than an exhibition of skill, as if his contribution were to excel at child's play, hide-and-seek, or magical tomfoolery.[23] Having an objective cultural slot for him – poet, theologian, culture critic, para-philosopher – would defeat his aim. By repeatedly slipping our nets, he hopes to make *a Socratic, existential contribution.*

[23] Especially in the early dialogues, Socrates can seem less than serious, raising all sorts of questions and refusing to give answers. He says that his wisdom is to know nothing, seems to be in a persistent hunt for definitions, refusing to propose any himself, and to be content to refute the efforts of others – attracting and exasperating, equally.

VIII. Socratic stings effect change

If I am recipient of an existential contribution, I should gather more than the information that *people like me* can be stung. I am humbled. I realize that *what* I make of the text is up to *me*. I can throw it aside, be slap dash, or struggle with it. If I decide to struggle there are options. One possibility is a strategy of suspicion or resentment. Another is to follow what Kierkegaard calls "love, that lenient interpreter." That is, I can adopt a strategy of charity.[24] Which way I resolve this crux shapes the interpreter I will be.

If I become a generous interpreter I'm will be both generous and *grateful* for insights bequeathed. If I interpret suspiciously, as a master un-masker, I will feel myself proud, above being fooled, and grateful for little. If I interpret resentfully, I will take offense that someone has attempted to pull the wool over my eyes. I won't be grateful that texts or words or images have come my way. A grateful person is different from an indifferent or self-righteous or haughty and condescending one.

A reader willing to praise the beauty and worth of a range of appearances or partial realities is different from one who filters all appearances through an ideological lens that reduces them, deflating them to a status where they are helpless pawns in a play of power or money, or pawns in a war of genders or ethnicities or classes or religions or sexual orientations. A debunker enjoys domination over appearances, texts, or partial realities at hand.

I suppose I might learn from such a lordly hermeneuticist that museums are extensions of colonial aggression (nothing more), that concert halls are monuments to wealth extracted from the poor (nothing more), that writing is a sublimation of sexual desire (nothing more), that Kierkegaard's *oeuvre* is a vain attempt to assuage guilt (nothing more), that because his stature was unimpressive, his writing is working out a Napoleon complex (nothing more), that his father's confession of guilt made him an emotional cripple. Things are dispraised for what they mask rather than praised for any gift they might bring, and for any occasion they might provide for thanksgiving.

I am a different person depending on the interpretative approach I accept and follow out. How much of the world of texts is a world I can love? Is it within my purview to love many or few? How large is the world I must despise or wish dead? What powers my writing? Is it wonder or competitive adrenalin, tender, sympathetic appreciation, or disgust, and resentment? I can (to some extent) tilt different interpretative postures this way or that, thus constituting an interpretative personality. Do I face texts or art or historical periods and events with indifferent royal aplomb? How much do I value my own halting or imperious voice?

I become *this* sort of interpreting person or *that* as I take my cues for interpretation this way or that. In the broadest sense, reading is an ethical venture, an activity that reveals something of what I take to be good, and take to be part of the good life, and take to be beyond the pale,

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24 See "Love, that lenient interpreter," *On Søren Kierkegaard*, chap. 5.

and my quickness to find fault with texts can be a stain on my reading character just as my quickness to find fault with persons can be. We are our labor, and if our labor is writing and reading, we expose who we are – I expose who *I* am (existentially) in 'the what' and 'the how' of my writing and reading.

IX. Kierkegaard's words

It is of interest to Socrates how *he* lives, how he relates to *the truth*, and how his life and his connection to the truth can have a *saving effect* on his interlocutors. Kelly Jolley writes,

> "[Philosophy] does not exist [for Socrates] as a sort of idol of which [Socrates] would be the guardian and which he must defend. It exists rather in its living relevance to the Athenians."[25]

Just so, the literature Kierkegaard produces in varied profusion does not exist as a tribute to "the literary life" or as a gift to "the great tradition" of literature, or to "the great tradition of philosophy." These are not temples in which he wished to enshrine his texts and himself.

On the best interpretation, Kierkegaard's words were to exist in their 'living relevance' to his townsfolk, or more accurately, in their 'living relevance' to single individuals in whose souls they lodged as a provocation, judge, and inspiration. Although he writes in veins that are in turn literary or aesthetic, ethical or philosophical, religious or counter-religious, these are not *ultimate* categories of exploration or veneration for him.

Kierkegaard is Socratic, first and last He worships at no single shrine but inaugurates, for each reader, a trial of self-knowledge, self-resolution, self-realization and selflessness (it both is and is not, "all about me").

He conducts trials of existence, where his subjectivity meets mine around love and responsibility, urgency and delight, and suffering. It is a trial of my existence, and yours, or in another of his favorite images, an invitation to sweep onto the floor for a solo dance before God – a dance before such divine presence as can be pleased or displeased with the tilt of my soul. Kierkegaard's writings bring us to the dance, and perhaps demonstrate some steps, but the rest is up to us – to *me*. So *his* manner of writing is in *our* service, in *my* service. In its poetry and philosophy, its comic mimicry and tearful pathos, it is a great gift, an existential contribution.

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[25] M. Merleau-Ponty: *In Praise*, 36, discussed, by Jolley, p. 12.

EXISTENTIAL DIMENSIONS IN KIERKEGAARD'S PERCEPTION OF SELF

Tamar Aylat-Yaguri[1]

Abstract

We might think that the self's structure and its delineation should always be essentially one and the same, while the content is expected to be the changing ingredient. We think only the self-content is expected to change through "stages on life's way." But in Kierkegaard's philosophy, along with its content, the very formation of the self changes. In this paper I elaborate on Kierkegaard's early view of the self's structure. I then emphasize the dramatic change we find in *Sickness unto Death*, where the self is changed in both structure and content.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, self, will, imagination, humour, death, reflexivity, narrative.

In Kierkegaard's early writings, from *Either/Or* to the *Postscript*, the self is depicted as having at its core one's will. Kierkegaard's view of the self postulates will as an Archimedean point of the self, from which volition shape existence. The will binds together the different aspects of one's self into a whole. In a way, the self *is* its will, or the lack of will. A coherent self relates itself to its will in a concrete way, by addressing directly the actual possibilities while considering its own interests. Additionally, a self incorporates imaginary constructions to produce a tangible picture of the willed situation.

Let us briefly consider a number of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. A, the aesthete from *Either/Or I*, wills pleasure over pain, and wishes to have laughter always on his side. William, from *Either/Or II*, loves his wife and wills with his whole heart, to have "the strength never to want to love any other."[2] De Silentio wills, in fear and trembling, to understand Abraham. Constantine Constantius wills to be happy again through repetition. Climacus wills to become a Christian and attain eternal happiness. Anti-Climacus *is* Christian. Is he eternally happy? For him, it seems, eternal happiness manifest itself as upbuilding and awakening. In being a Christian, Anti-Climacus *is* eternally happy, and so anybody can be who opens his eyes to see the truth. So, what now? What does Anti-Climacus will?

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2 S. Kierkegaard: *Either/Or*, Part II, transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987, 9 [*EO2*, 9].

I want to suggest that he wills nothing much. He wills nothing much for himself, nothing that takes over and dominates his life. Clearly none of his willingness is defined as infinite or eternal. *I want to suggest that he is not constituted by his will as the rest of the pseudonyms are.* His self is transformed so that different psychological building blocks are needed to make this new construct intelligible.

I.

Let's consider Climacus, to see a psychological constitution of self – the building blocks – that Kierkegaard employs before he moves to the special case of Anti-Climacus. Famously, Climacus presents himself in the introduction to the *Postscript* in the following way:

> "I, Johannes Climacus, born and bred in this city and now thirty years old, an ordinary human being like most folk, assume that a highest good, called an eternal happiness, awaits me just as it awaits a housemaid and a professor. I have heard that Christianity is one's prerequisite for this good. I now ask how I may enter into relation to this doctrine."[3]

Climacus perceives his *self*, the construct and contents represented by his use of the word "I, as something separated from the world; or in the case at hand, something separated from Christianity, which he wants to engage. I'll consider here three elements that constitute this self: will, imagination and self-humour. Together they form a psychological construction that addresses the question: how does the self grasp itself?

The *will* is the determining factor of the self. The answer to: who are you? is not any specific trait, attribute, or characteristic – being tall, dark and handsome. The answer to "What are you?" is translated to the question, "What do you wish for?" What do you will yourself to be? Climacus, by his free choice, wills the highest good. That's the best account we have of who he is.[4] Passion is transformed into will that defines a purpose: where am I aiming my life? This makes will the decisive component of the self. Within the stages on life's way, this places Climacus in the ethic-religious realm.

Imagination is the second element of the human soul. Climacus regards it as "wings, that were given to human beings to elevate themselves.[5] Imagination, unlike fantasy, is constrained and focused by thoughts and feelings. Unlike fantasy, it's not radically opposed to rational or emotional common sense. Imaginary constructions illustrate a possible existence (while fantasy illustrates impossible existence). Climacus' aim towards eternal happiness depends on his ability to imagine

3 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982, 15–16 [CUP1, 15–16].

4 Some writers distinguish direct from indirect volitionalism. From his opening words, it seems that Climacus presupposes direct volition and that his is the highest level of the power to will.

5 *CUP1*, 361.

what that might mean. He desires an existence that he has not yet experienced and whose reality is not yet his. The possibility of making it his own reality through his actions is dependent on imagining eternal happiness. He weaves the imagined missing links of existence into his well-constructed dialectical thinking. By doing so he creates a fuller and more coherent picture of his life, here and hereafter.

The third element in this account of the self is *humour*. Thinking and dialectical analysis (in which imagination has a major role) are connected by humour with the actuality of the here and now. In the face of suffering, for example, a laughing (not mocking) self-humour can see the world for what it is.[6] For Climacus humour is an intermediate bridge between imaginary constructions and perceptions of reality. Why is this bridge of self-humour required? Being able to imagine a desired reality illustrates a possible existence, but this ability is also a source of pain. It is painful to emphasize the gap between the desirable and the existing. Imagination enhances or spotlights all that has not yet been achieved. Imagining what might be creates a gap, a vast abyss, a rift between where Climacus is, and where he wishes to be. At this sensitive point, despair could very well take over. Self-Humour becomes important in monitoring despair.

Climacus says, humorously, that eternal happiness awaits him – just as it awaits a housemaid and a professor. The humour is that this most serious, self-important thinker, writer of tomes, suddenly identifies his fate with that of a simple housemaid or a foolishly pompous professor. Here, Climacus demonstrates his ability to laugh at himself and at his situation. Why, in the midst of earnestly confessing, with his soul at stake, does he mention these figures? Is he just being liberal, open-minded, remarking that in assuming eternal happiness he is nothing special? But then we realise that the housemaid and professor are just the opposite, from who he takes himself to be. We also know that even if either could win eternal happiness, we still need to ask, what does eternal happiness means anyway? Could Climacus, the housemaid, and the professor *all* join the society of the saved? Isn't Climacus more likely to distance himself from such society, to think, with Groucho Marx, "I wouldn't belong to any club that accepts me as a member?!"

Without self-humour, Climacus couldn't seriously will his absurd goal of gaining eternal happiness. If he thought seriously about his goal – surely a remote possibility – his will would be broken; suffering would take over. Humour lets him bridge the abyss between imagination and reality that otherwise would remain in ultimate opposition. Once imagination and reality are fused – one attains faith, when Climacus attains Christianity (if he does), humour is no longer needed.

[6] J. Watkin: *Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard's Philosophy*, Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press 2000, 126.

II.

Now let's move to the next pseudonym, Anti-Climacus. Anti-Climacus' view of the self is different from Climacus' view and from the view of previous pseudonyms. It is not enough any more to bring together and harmonize the constitutive elements of the self through passion and will, imagination and humour. What is required now from the self (in order for it to be a self) is a whole new take on death – hence a whole new take on life. In addition, a different psychological formation is required. The self is not an individualistic entity facing the world, apart from it and its desired qualities. Now the self is a self exactly because is does *not* stand "outside" the world, but is absorbed or immersed in it. The world-view is changed. We can see the change emerge 5 years before *SUD* in Kierkegaard's discourse, *The Thorn in the Flesh*:

A person is looking for peace, but there is change: day and night, summer and winter, life and death; a person is looking for peace, but there is change: fortune and misfortune, joy and sorrow; … a person is looking for peace – where did he not look for it – even in the disquietude of distraction – where did he not look for it in vain – even in the grave![7]

Peace is not found anywhere, not even in death. This could be seen as the entry-gate to Anti-Climacus' world-view. I'll briefly discuss his approach to death in this discourse, and then move to the new formulation of self.

What makes Anti-Climacus' self different is his new take on death, a new perspective that is required in order for the self to be a self. Anti-Climacus attributes to "the natural man" a standard view of death.[8] The "natural man" thinks that "Humanly speaking, death is the last of all, and, humanly speaking, there is hope only as long as there is life."[9] Death is the boundary to life and the end of everything, including hope. This the view of death of non-Christians referred to as "natural man."

For a Christian believer, however, death is not the "end of the world," it is not the greatest threat in and to life. It is not the end, firstly, because the believer has faith in the resurrection and the afterlife.[10] Secondly, it is not the end, because the gravest risk is not death but despair in this life, despair over failing to be oneself.

Anti-Climacus introduces a fear greater than the fear of death, a fear so great that it overcomes a fear of death. The "natural man" knows no fear greater than death. The Christian fears for his immortal soul, which is a fear greater than death. True, the Christian can continue to fear "everything that goes under the name of earthly and temporal suffering … [that is, all] earthly and worldly matters, death included.[11] But that fear is no longer dominate: "Only the Christian knows what is meant by sick-

7 S. Kierkegaard: *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990, 328.

8 S. Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 8.

9 Ibid., 7.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 8.

ness unto death." It means a sickness concerning the state of one's soul, not a sickness at the fact one will die. In facing this soul-sickness, a Christian gains "a courage that the natural man does not know." He gains this courage by "learning to fear something even more horrifying, than death.[12]

Psychology that is based on "human nature, and on prevailing norms will not understand Anti-Climacus. Normal human beings are supposed to fear death. Existential psychotherapists, like the American, Irvin Yalom, write that death is the extinction of consciousness, and so the extinction of everything.[13] Psychologically speaking, consciousness is all that we have and death is the extinction of consciousness. Thus death is the extinction of everything. For a healthy psychological profile, *some* fear of death is not just normal but is also *required*. Anyone who doesn't fear death to a reasonable degree should be regarded as dangerous to himself and/or to others. This represents the common thought in the field of existential psychotherapy (other realms of psychotherapy may not place such an emphasis on the normal dread of death).

Anti-Climacus does not accept these psychological presuppositions. He does not seriously fear death; nevertheless, he is not a danger to himself and poses no danger to others. On the contrary: he testifies that he enjoys consummate health and vitality.[14] Thus it's clear that we need a new psychological exposition, a Christian one, and Anti-Climacus provides it.

Franz Kafka takes an approach to death that could help us to understand Anti-Climacus. He writes:

> "one of the first signs of the beginning of understanding is the wish to die. This life appears unbearable, another unattainable. One is no longer ashamed of wanting to die; one asks to be moved from the old cell, which one hates, to a new one, which one only in time will come to hate. In this there is also a residue of belief that during the move the master will chance to come along the corridor, look at the prisoner and say: 'this man is not to be locked up again. He is to come to me.'"[15]

Kafka writes these insightful thoughts on death in his *Blue Octavo Notebooks* (1917–1919). He may have been reading *Sickness unto Death* at this time. He mentions Kierkegaard explicitly on the same day that he writes:

> "The lamentation around the deathbed is actually the lamentation over the fact that here no dying in the true sense has taken place... Our salvation is death, but not this one."[16]

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12 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death,* op. cit.
13 I.D. Yalom: *Momma and the meaning of life: Tales of Psychotherapy*, New York: Harper Perennial 2000.
14 Ibid.
15 F. Kafka: *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, Cambridge, MA: Exact Change 1991, 72.
16 Ibid., 99–100.

He distinguishes death observed "around the deathbed" and true death. Every death that is not *my* death is irrelevant to my salvation. So "Salvation is death, but not this one," for this one is only an observed death. We are accustomed to think of death as the end of all, the absolute cessation and termination. But Kafka reminds us that this is true only in the case of our own death, and that any other death could bring "the real sorrow of the end, but not *the* end." In his Kafkaesque way he turns sorrow against us in saying that we cry and lament around the deathbed *not* because the person died, but because his death is not enough – for us his death is not the end of all, so we still have to face it, and this is a cause of sorrow, that the end has not come.

III.

We need a new psychological exposition to understand the new take on death that emerges with Anti-Climacus' Christian constitution of self. The new concept of self in *Sickness unto Death* takes an unexpected point of departure. The self is no longer an individualistic entity facing the world, apart from it and its desired qualities. Anti-Climacus doesn't even start with the self because the self is not yet *there*. At the start, the individual is *not* a self. The self is formed through relationships that at the start are not-yet-a-self. He focuses on what he calls "spirit".

Once a self is formed, it does *not* stand "outside" the world, but is immersed *in* it. W*ill* is no longer the Archimedean point. The starting place is not a point, but a field that encloses and composes a number of opposed existential poles. Of course will, imagination and self-humour still play a part in the dynamics of this field. But their presence is less pronounced. They are not the dominating force or centre of the self. In the new construction, they are subordinate factors.

Imagine Anti-Climacus' vision of what precedes the formation of self as a shadow presented on the wall of a cave. The self is not yet in that picture, first, as a matter of theory: When we take a theoretical stance, we stand back from the object that is viewed. Thus the viewer giving a theoretical account does not include his role as viewer or theorist. And second, the self is not in the wall-picture because the self at issue is a practical or existential self, and that self has to be the unique individual, Anti-Climacus, not a wall-map of abstract relational polarities. These polarities must become synthesized, glued together as his own self, as the field of his existential living or being. That won't happen on the wall of a cave.

Nevertheless this is his abstract account of the world of self-relations seen objectively as something outside my self. The projected picture provides an array of existential poles or axes that prompt a broad construal of the aesthetic and the ethical-religious world-views. The poles of finite/infinite, temporal/eternal, necessary/ possible, physical/ psychical, are synthesized in a particular way in the formation of any particular self.

1. The aesthetic view of existence give stress to the finite, the temporal, the necessary (or factual), and the physical poles, neglecting the opposite poles.

2. The ethical-religious view of existence gives stress to the infinite, the eternal, freedom, and the psychical poles, neglecting the opposite poles.

3. When the opposed poles are more appropriately balanced, neither pole dominating, there is the possibility of a self that overcomes the primal fear of death.

Remember that whatever Climacus wants, he wants with infinite striving passion. Anti-Climacus, in contrast, doesn't *strive* to better his life, but is struck by something prior to striving or wanting. Instead of a striving will being active, one's will is overcome by the sense of already being immersed in the world, by the sense of will, imagination, and humour now being shifted to the background. When *striving* dominates, the vividness of a world retreats except as a field of struggle. If there is a world ready to intervene, to strike him, to disrupt him, the frantic will, bent on mastery, leaves no room for it to arrive. Anti-Climacus is immersed in a world whose vividness puts the striving will to one side.

Anti-Climacus dies to the world that Climacus tried to master. The world Anti-Climacus is immersed in is not the world others find to be a world inviting the conquering self. In leaving mastery behind, Anti-Climacus finds himself open to a new world saturated by what he will call Absolute Power. The non-striving exemplified by Anti-Climacus provides space for Absolute Power to speak and create. This Power unifies existential polarities and their background and the newly formed self finds itself immersed in a new world-landscape.

IV.

There is a contrast, as I mentioned, between the abstract, theoretical wall-picture of self-factors, on the one hand, and the actual existential formation of a self, on the other. Getting this picture of self-synthesis theoretically correct, both the loss of striving and the new world then available focused in an Absolute Power, is an accomplishment one can take pride in. But getting the picture right doesn't quite earn a life-time achievement award. Getting it theoretically correct is only half the challenge. To actually *live from* the picture, to be an *exemplar* of what the picture puts in focus, requires an existential *willingness to live in accordance with it*. One can get the picture right, seeing correctly that what is needed is a dying to the world. But "getting the picture right" objectively is irrelevant, and pride in ones intellectual achievement is beside the point. To *live from* or *embody* the truth of the picture correctly, existentially, practically, is an *infinite* task, one that can never be accomplished.

For Anti-Climacus the task of embodying this truth is not a matter of striving (as Climacus would have it) but a task of submission, of *yielding* to a power that constitutes the self. Despair holds a place for a complex existential demand: one is prompted to stay immersed in the world, not

the world of human, worldly affairs, and striving, but the world offered by a transcendent, absolute Other. The dynamic in which that despair is assuaged incorporates viewer and vision, human being and world-view, and enfolds the dynamic of selfhood.

There is one more matter to explore. This account of the new psychological construction is not quite enough, since it is not clear what makes the self dynamic *mine*? What gives *me* authority over this self? And what makes it *continuously* mine?

If we were to draw a simple picture, we might imagine, for Climacus, a circle with a small "w" at the centre for "the will" – knowing that nevertheless there is no "place" within the self where the will resides. Perhaps the image of a seedless grape self would do for something without an ontological centre. The self in Anti-Climacus' is centre-less self, but less like a seedless grape that like an old rambling city, a painting with detail strewn all over, or a piece of music, say an overture with several motifs. These images help to show how something (a self) can be more or less unified and organized, a functionally unfolding entity, yet without a discernable centre.

V.

Let's imagine Anti-Climacus's self as a musical work, a set of lines unfolding in time for the ear. In *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, Edward Mooney explains that: "self is like the tonal centre that defines a musical key."[17] The self unfolds as the piece unfolds. A musical key can exfoliate, form fluently through time, moving as the music weaves and rounds out, without there being an ontologically separate centre. There is no *one particular* source of its unified authority. This music, like the self of *Sickness*, has no "independent *choosing* centre (or faculty of will)."[18] And there is no one particular source of Its unified authority is not found in any one place but is dispersed through the piece as it is played.

Anti-Climacus's faithful non-despairing self unfolds just as a piece of music unfolds. The power of music seems to bequeath to the piece an elusive sense of authoritative tonal centre. The self is revealed as "a network of relationship that makes up a (perhaps incomplete) whole that relates to itself. This whole or self ensemble then relates [receptively] to something outside itself, a power that grounds or founds it."[19]

Now what makes this complex, dynamic phenomenon, *mine* in particular? What makes it *continuously* mine? I can't peer into my inner space and see the elements of self unmistakably branded with my name on them. So at best, we can argue from the analogy of music. We can explore how the presence of *reflexivity, gravitational force,* and *narrative*

17 E.F. Mooney: *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology From Either/Or to Sickness Unto Death*, New York and London: Routledge 1996, 98. The image for the self provided by Mooney in his book, seems just right for the concept of self under discussion.
18 Mooney, op. cit., 92.
19 Ibid., 94.

centre serve to give a piece of music its signature identity. By analogy, the presence of these three can provide the sense that the dynamic "self-relating self-relations dependent on Another" is mine, and continuously mine.

VI.

Through *reflexivity*, the complex bundle of relations exerts authority just in the way it comes together as *this very field* of its relationships, relating to itself, and to a grounding power.

> "No one element in this field dominates, or even easily separated out from the other, for each element is defined in terms of its polar opposite."[20]

Each element belongs to the others, recognizing the other element as "mine," and the totality as "mine." The way a particular a piece of music becomes what it is, each element belonging to the whole, and the whole claiming the parts as "mine," is just the way self-factors in a field of unfolding relationships belong together in a whole, where any one element can say "mine" of the others to which it belongs.

Through reflection we are self aware of our self, "we make sense of a self ... by specifying the relational, reflexive field it constitutes. This means sensing its connections to various persons, institutions, and projects; it means sensing values, ideals, points of aspiration that, in the nature of the case, a self will fail to live up to. So sensing a self or sphere will also mean sensing its forms of failure or despair."[21]

The self, sensing itself, can trace itself and become aware of itself either in inward or outward cues, in an inner sense of delight or in "outer" sense of Godly presence. The latter, outer sense of divine presence, provides the grounding power that "roots us" by "rooting out" despair.

Let's briefly consider the last two principles. Beyond reflexivity, self is a centre of gravitational force, and a narrative centre. As a centre of gravitational force, "The vectors of self are infused, activated, empowered, from without."[22] For Anti-Climacus it is mostly the grounding power of faith, and "attaining faith is not at last an act of choice. It is, as Anti-Climacus has it, being grounded in another."[23] Other elements that place the self as a centre of gravitational force are family, friends, work relations, institutions, projects, values, ideals, aspiration and will.

As a *narrative* centre, the self creates and maintains its particularity and continuity, by being and becoming the story that it tells about itself. As a narrative centre of gravity, a self "...is something of outmost importance for stability and function, unmistakably present, yet tantalizingly difficult to isolate."[24] It's difficult to isolate because it is not an item or element, but a pattern discerned, or felt, as an elusive dynamic.

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20 Mooney, op. cit., 98.
21 Ibid., 95.
22 Ibid., 93.
23 Ibid., 97.
24 Ibid., 99.

The story that Anti-Climacus is narrating is the story of the truly religious self, the Christian self, that contains an important truth:

> "The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing [giving away] to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."[25]

To sum up: The self in Anti-Climacus' work is distinctive because will and striving for goals are diminished; the world of striving retreats to be replaced by a new world in which the self is serenely, receptively, immersed. The new world is theologically the world of God's dominance – the striving self is displaced. Both self and the world, Christianly speaking, are sustained by God, are immersed in powers the self does not control or confront oppositionally, but yields to receptively, willingly. It is a world where I do not will X to be done, but pray that "thy will be done." Non-theologically, the world that the non-despairing self is dependent on and immersed in, is a world of intricate social and natural relations: one is dependent on bread and butter, cows and grass, sun and rain, mothers and fathers, chieftains and prime ministers, sheriffs and school teachers. Escaping despair means acknowledging this dependence, and while willing to achieve certain goals, also yielding to the support that cows and butter, teachers and sisters, will provide.

Two psychological constructions are found in Kierkegaard. One has will as its centre, and employs imaginary constructions and self-humour. The other overcomes fear of death, has no centre, and is a field of dynamic self-relations. It is subjected to reflexivity, dependent on Another, held by gravitational force, and centred by its narrative. Elements are held together, by recognizing their belonging together, which makes this unfolding psychological construction continuously mine.

25 Mooney, op. cit., 99.

KIERKEGAARD'S EXISTENTIAL THERAPY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBJECT

Tatiana Shchyttsova[1]

Abstract

Paper focuses on two, essentially connected, things: the very way of Kierkegaard's intellectual work on the one hand and his vision of the subject on the other hand. The author argues that Kierkegaard practiced a kind of therapy by his writings to be defined as *existential rehabilitation of the Present.* Trying to clarify then the concept of the subject underlying such a therapy the author shows to what extent Kierkegaard's vision of the subject breaks with the concept of the subject characteristic to the classical modernity/the Enlightenment.

Keywords: existential rehabilitation of the Present, indirect communication, existential reduction, author, antinomic subject, the a-hermeneutic.

> "Gewiß, Kierkegaard spricht zum Verzweifelten wie ein Arzt zu seinem Patienten".
>
> *M. Theunissen*

Introduction

In 1962 Niels Thulstrup (one of the Kierkegaard leading researchers of the previous century) suggested considering Kierkegaard not as a thinker or an author of some teaching but as a complex of problems – *the Complex of problems called Kierkegaard*[2]. With such a smart definition Thulstrup tried to overcome a number of interpretative deadlocks which had emerged by that time due to the fact that Kierkegaard could not be unambiguously ascribed to any intellectual direction, philosophical or theological tradition or school. Although the situation with reception and interpretation of Kierkegaard's works in the European intellectual milieu has changed since the middle of the 20th century, I find the definition of Thulstrup topical insofar as it im-

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[2] N. Thulstrup: The Complex of problems called Kierkegaard, in: Johnson H.A., Thulstrup N. (eds): *A Kierkegaard Critique. An international selection of essays interpreting Kierkegaard*, New York: Harper 1962, 286–296.

plicitly keeps the *unrest* which Kierkegaard's thinking for many years has evoked and which certainly needs a further careful reflection on our part since we, intellectuals of the 21 century, are affected by this unrest.

In my presentation, I would like to touch upon the mentioned above peculiar disturbing impact of Kierkegaard's works by considering two, essentially connected, questions. The first concerns the very way of intellectual work of the great Dane; the second one – his vision of the subject. The idea that Kierkegaard spoke/acted as a kind of therapist, goes back to Kierkegaard himself. I would like to support so to say this idea and to show (in the first part of the paper) that a kind of therapy he practiced can be defined as *existential rehabilitation of the Present.* In the second part, I will try then to clarify the concept of the subject which underlies such a therapeutic authorship and to ascertain to what extent Kierkegaard's vision of the subject breaks with the concept of the subject characteristic to the classical modernity/Enlightenment.

1. Existential rehabilitation of the Present

The principal relevance of Kierkegaard's certain ideas for the post-traditional world was in different ways thematized and stressed by a whole number of western thinkers including e. g. Calvin O. Schrag, Merold Westphal, Helmuth Fahrenbach und Jürgen Habermas.[3] Many of them highlight in this regard Kierkegaard's interpretation of Self in terms of the possibility of becoming a self.

At the same time, the reception of Kierkegaard's works has always contained critical reflections regarding the (so called) isolation of a single individual in Kierkegaard. So Habermas pointed out pretty rigorously that there are certain conceptual assumptions in Kierkegaard (like ethical decisionism or religious isolation of the individual) which make up principal obstacles for a *communicative* interpretation of becoming a self. Although such a criticism is undoubtedly not groundless, the whole question is not as unambiguous as it might seem. I share rather the interpretative efforts which, instead of opposing isolation and communication, seek to explicate their tricky compatibility in Kierkegaard. I argue in this regard, that it is the very way of Kierkegaard's intellectual work, which provides a challenging argument and the reason for an original viewing of the being (existence) of a single individual from a communicative perspective. In this connection it must be clarified below, why and in what sense Kierkegaard's intellectual activity in all its multifacetedness can be characterized as existential therapy.

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[3] See: M.J. Matustik, M. Westphal (eds): Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity, Indiana University Press 1995; H. Fahrenbach: Philosophische Anthropologie – Ethik – Gesellschaftstheorie. Grundzüge einer anthropologisch-praktisch zentrierten Philosophie, in: R. Brunner, P. Kelbel (Hg.): *Anthropologe, Ethik und Gesellschaft,* Frankfurt and New York 2000, 210 f.; J. Habermas: Geschichtsbewusstsein und posttraditionale Identität. Die Westorientierung der Bundesrepublik, in: *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung: Kleine politische Schriften VI,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1987, 172.

While talking about the new way of philosophizing and authorship in Kierkegaard, one thinks first of all of his famous strategy of the indirect communication, which brought him the title "Danish Socrates". The word *maieutics*, although it in no way loses its relevance for Kierkegaard's thought, cannot nonetheless completely determine the practical sense of his intellectual activity. I am going to show that it would be more applicable to define the fundamental practical effect of his writings as an *existential rehabilitation of the present.* By this term I understand transformation of the age *through* an existential conversion of individuals. The essence of such conversion consists in an awakening of the individual capability to become an ethical self and, correspondingly, to act in a respective socio-historical situation on the basis of ethical self-determination.

Kierkegaard's existential therapy, like any other kind of therapy, is founded on an appropriate diagnosis. Kierkegaard finds his contemporaries in a state of distracted self-forgetfulness. The pathetic idea of the universal objective truth, which is flourishing on the ground of the Hegelian philosophy and is taken up by the press, leads, after the Kierkegaard's critical diagnosis of the present age, to the dissolution of all human beings *en masse.* In this context, he states: "The age and the people … become increasingly unreal".[4] With such insight into his epoch Kierkegaard shows himself as a "private thinker" which initiates a *private practice* of a particular kind, namely the practice of an ethical (or ethical-religious) addressing, which aims at helping an existing individual (a potential recipient) to clearly understand himself/herself in his/her own time. Accordingly, the main objective of Kierkegaard's entire criticism (which has at least four general aspects: (1) philosophical criticism contra Hegel, (2) social criticism of the ethical indolence, anonymity, the leveling effect of the emerging mass-media, (3) clerical-theological criticism regarding falsification and concealment of the existential truth (and the existential challenge) of Christianity, of being-a-Christian, (4) psychological criticism of the internal psychological mechanisms of self-deception) is the exposure of those forces of the age which prevent the desired awakening of self and lead to progressive forgetting of the subjective dimension of the truth.

Kierkegaard's programmatic thesis "Subjectivity is truth"[5], means that the truth has to be understood as a passionate *fulfillment* of the subjective appropriation. It is this incomprehensible and non-objectifiable *fulfillment*, with which the therapeutic endeavor of the private thinker has to do. In this connection Kierkegaard (Climacus) suggests such additional "nomination" as a *subjective thinker*, who is supposed to be characterized by the ability to maintain, to touch, to evoke the subjective dimension of the truth.

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[4] S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and transl. by A. Hannay, Cambridge University Press 2009, 267.

[5] S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 174.

It is worth noting that in methodological sense, Kierkegaard's existential therapy *as* a certain communicative strategy is comparable with the phenomenological reduction. The indirect communication in the same way as the phenomenological reduction involves such a decisive moment as taking the individual out of a state that does not allow to discern *the things themselves (die Sachen selbst)*. Phenomenology comprehends this state as dwelling in the so called natural attitude (die natürliche Einstellung). Since the thing itself about which an existential therapist is concerned, is the individual's capability to become a self, it implies that the corresponding attitude which has to be deactivated (so to say) must be of an existential sort. Indeed, one find in Kierkegaard various descriptions and designations of that state which not without reasons can be defined as the *existential* natural attitude. What the natural attitude in the existential sense means was e. g., pretty clearly explained by Kierkegaard in his famous outline of the lectures *The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication*. It means namely uncritical (unreflexive) self-identification of the individual with the pregiven tradition and customs, with the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. The word reduction designates thus in both cases a certain *qualitative* change in the state of the subject. The change consists in transition from the natural attitude (whether of a cognitive or existential type) to another one which is supposed to be *original and primary* in this or that sense.

As for the *terminus ad quem* (destination) of the existential reduction, it is characterized by Kierkegaard with two complementary concepts – *primitivity* and *naïveté*[6]. These concepts mean the existential state, in which the individual engaged in the ethical communication becomes thoroughly preoccupied with the only, very simple, truth that in his existence he per se is a capacity to become himself. In addition, Kierkegaard indicates that according to its very essence this capacity is an ongoing *challenge* for the existing individual. It is so due to the fact that human existence is characterized by such inherent feature as a *reexamination* of the universally human[7], interpreted by Kierkegaard as a repeatedly renewed revising of two fundamental, and quite primitive, questions – namely: What does it mean to be a human? and Whether you and me are human beings? It is not difficult to see that the famous Kierkegaardian theme of the ethical choice as a responsible self-determination of the individual can be considered to be grounded in the primitivity gained (opened) by means of the existential reduction and distinguished by the vital element of existential revising described above.

What is important to emphasize in this regard, is a remarkable fact that the existential reduction – or, as Kierkegaard puts it, a *return to the primitivity*[8] – is seen by him as a practice which comes about in a respective communicative context. Indirect communication, which Kier-

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6 Søren Kierkegaards Papirer. Gylendal 1968–1978.S. Bd. VIII-2. København 1968. B 82,2 – 82,4; B 89. (Farther – Pap.)

7 Pap. VIII-2, B 82, 6; B 89.

8 Pap. Bd. VIII-2, København 1968. B 82,2 – 82,4; B 89.

kegaard not only thematizes but also strives to practice, is an intersubjective experience which is considered to allow for the existential reduction so that the reduction must be thought in an essential interplay with intersubjectivity. What Kierkegaard's existential therapy counts upon, is thus a reduction which takes place due/in/through the communicative act. A kind of practical, intersubjectively grounded reduction, which is incompatible either with solipsism or with decisionism is at issue.

Kierkegaard's maieutics shows itself as a *fundamental* undertaking (venture) in a very specific, namely *evocative* sense. The foundations, with which it deals, can not be put, but only pro-voked. Maieutist cannot postulate anything in this practical field. He can only try to indirectly induce the addressee to fulfill the existential reduction that is to (re-)actualize and to keep awake the revising moment of existence. Insofar as such a masterful provocation succeeds, a respective therapeutic effect can be interpreted as an existential *rehabilitation* of a single individual. This existential rehabilitation is understood as a renewal and reactualization of the individual's capability to determine himself/herself in a respective socio-historical situation, to take responsibility for his/her being. Let me remind, that this evocative, yes, existentially disturbing practice was defined at the very beginning of my presentation as the existential rehabilitation of the Present. The definition seems to be completely accurate, as according to Kierkegaard the revising moment in human existence acts as a fundamental principle (condition of possibility) of the renewal of a respective, social-historical situation. It means that Kierkegaard's existential practice, while focusing on a single individual, is enforced in the interests of historical life as well. Thus, the Kierkegaardian battle for the individual shows itself at the same time as a battle for a new historical era, namely for such a one which will contrapose to the "the cunning of the reason" ("der List der Vernunft") the irreducible and inabolishable *risk* of the ethical existing.

Well, it is this essential linkage of the historical moment, on the one hand and a single individual on the other hand, which the existential therapy treats. As such it differs substantially from many other types of therapy (incl. Existential psychoanalysis of Sartre or classical psychoanalysis of Freud). Despite certain similarities between Kierkegaard's existential praxis and every of the above mentioned types of (psycho) therapy respectively, neither Sartrian nor Freudian approaches address to a *mutual foundation* of the individual and the epoch in such a way that the effect of the therapeutic communication (if any) should be theirs (the individual's and the epoch's) *equaloriginal transformation*.

2. The subject as a response and a disposition

We have now come to the point to pay our attention to the problem of the subject announced in the title. The latter implies that Kierkegaard's existential therapy makes the concept of the subject problematic, *questionable*. In the following I want to substantiate this claim which cannot of course ignore the fact that many ideas and motives of Kierkeg-

aard's thought (regarding e. g., responsibility and self-determination and transformation of the epoch by virtue of critical reflection, etc.) sound typical in the spirit of Enlightenment. The fact makes the whole situation with the subject in Kierkegaard very ambiguous. In this regard in the second part of my paper I am going to examine to what extent the very way of Kierkegaard's authorship *undermines* the concept of the subject considered to be representative for classical modernity. The corresponding analysis will be carried out in two steps according to two essentially interconnected aspects of the indirect communication in Kierkegaard: the first one concerns the self-positioning of Kierkegaard as an author, the second one – the very character of the therapeutic process supposed to take place between an existential maieutist and his addressee. Let us start with the first one.

2.1. Author

Kierkegaard's own self-positioning as an author, which has intrigued both usual readers and scholars, since the very first publications of the Dane is, undoubtedly, one of the most decisive indications of his masterful declination from the understanding of the subject suggested by the Enlightenment. If Kierkegaard like Kant – or much later Habermas – had addressed his call to his contemporaries in a direct form (I mean the call to think and to act independently and, doing so, to shape sociality on the basis of critical reflection), – yes, if he had communicated in this way so that his word would have *directly* (re)presented his own personal position, he should have been regarded as a thinker purely representative of the Enlightenment. However Kierkegaard's existential addressing presupposes an ultimately different vision of positioning of an author as an agent of history. Let me recall in this regard one important assertion from Kierkegaard's *Papers*:

> "An understanding of the totality of my work as an author, its maieutic purpose, etc. requires also an understanding of my personal existence [*Existeren*] as an author, what I *qua* author have done with my personal existence to support it, illuminate it, conceal it, give it direction, etc., something which is more complicated than and just as interesting as the whole literary activity. Ideally the whole thing goes back to 'the single individual' [*den Enkelte*], who is not I in an empirical sense but is the author"[9].

It is worthwhile at this point to briefly recall the general strategy of his therapeutically oriented authorship. Its therapeutic effect was interpreted by Kierkegaard himself as a kind of existential awakening[10]. By means of remarkable polyphony, Kierkegaard's authorial strategy had "to pose the riddle of awakening". This riddle, as we remember, consisted in "a balanced esthetic and religious productivity, simultaneously". Such a strategic task, according to Kierkegaard's account, had been fulfilled by Feb. 1846 which was indicated by the publication of *Concluding Post-*

9 Pap. X-1, A 145.
10 Pap. X-1, A 118.

script seen as "the midpoint" (i.e. the midpoint in the balance achieved) and therefore also as "the turning point" of his authorship. Thus *Postscript* transcended so to say the difference between the two sides of Kierkegaard's authorship by subordinating them to the same strategic task – the task of existential awakening. Due such transcending, *Postscript* takes an exclusive position among all other (previously written) texts. It gets a point from which all previous Kierkegaard's literary productivity is accessed *as a whole*.

What is important here is not to perceive this essentially philosophical gesture as that of totalization in the sense of a rational "summing up" or systematization. It is rather the gesture which indicates and refers to the existential problem formulated by Kierkegaard personally. As it follows from the quotation given earlier, at issue is the way of being of the single individual *as an author* i.e. as a kind of actor who is supposed to address the others in a respective social-historical situation. It implicates that the transcending moment mentioned above is *valid* in/for Kierkegaard not as the principle enabling to reach the ultimate objective position, but as the principle indicating a *participatory* position of subjectivity since it shows itself concerned about how certain individuals should be addressed, resp. how the authorial strategy should look like. In other words, the transcending moment must be considered not from the perspective of building a system but from the communicative perspective. To be sure, subjectivity (of "the subjective thinker") cannot be reduced to any author of the polyphonic authorship. Neither can it be reduced to the whole polyphony of them. Nevertheless it is interpreted in and through all of them having to do with the very strategy of their dispersion, dis-play, disposition. I use the last word in the military sense of a structured group of "voices" which, metaphorically speaking, has to take its "goal" (that is an address*ee*) into encirclement. Thus it seems inappropriate to speak of some authorial *position* of Kierkegaard. His authorship indeed is rather the dis-position, the mobile and flexible disposition constantly open to renewal and artistic re-configurations.

What I have been trying to do is to clarify the essential connection of such a masterful communicative strategy and Kierkegaard's principle of subjectivity. One of the most revealing formulations of the principle was given by Kierkegaard in his *Papers*:

> "Objectivity is believed to be superior to subjectivity, but it is just the opposite; that is to say, an objectivity which is within a corresponding subjectivity is the fin*a*le. The system was an inhuman something to which no human being could correspond as auctor and executer [11]."

Thus, Kierkegaard develops a concept of the single individual who proves his own entanglement in the historical context as well as his ability to transcend it. Kierkegaard's single individual manages to do it by creating an *imaginary disposition* which being rooted in his subjectivity performs an existential addressing to the contemporaries. The

[11] Pap. X-1, A 145.

complexity and depth of this approach goes beyond the scope of the Enlightenment philosophical paradigm for many reasons, but first of all because the subjectivity gets such a feature as performativity. That is why it must be stressed that the phrase "a corresponding subjectivity" (in the quotation above) already implies "a *responding* subjectivity". All said above allows to claim that the existential maieutics is an independent dimension of communicative experience, which is irreducible either to the hermeneutic-ontological dimension represented by Gadamer or to the pragmatic one represented by Habermas.

2.2. An antinomic therapy for an antinomic subject

As it was outlined earlier, the problem of the subject has to be approached not only from the point of view of the Kierkegaard's self-positioning as an author but also from the point of view of the very character of the therapeutic process supposed to take place between an existential maieutist and his address*ee*. Kierkegaard's existential therapy turns out to be quite an antinomic undertaking if one tries to understand it according to the classical logic of identification and representation. In this regard I would like to point out here two basic antinomies that characterize the therapeutic relationship between the existential maieutist and his addressee in Kierkegaard. The first antinomy reads like this: Therapy has the character of manipulating and at the same time has nothing to do with the domination. Let me remind a famous phrase of Kierkegaard which, pretty laconically describing the intention of the therapeutic process, conceives this first antinomy no less provocative: "To deceive into the truth" ("At bedrage ind i Sandheden"[12]). Because the truth is interpreted by Kierkegaard as subjectivity, it implies that at issue in the indirect (ethical) communication is by no means any kind of indoctrination by the communicator, but a certain existential capability of the receiver. Therefore, Kierkegaard speaks so much about the masterful tactics of self-eliminating, self-restrain which indicates that it is deactivating of the subject as a domination instance that is at issue in the communicative field of the existential maeutics.

The second antinomy can be formulated as follows: although the roles "therapist-patient" are supposed to be assigned in the existential therapy quit clear, the goal of therapy (i.e. a therapeutic effect which is expected to happen to an addressee of the therapeutic communication) applies to the therapist to the same extent as to the patient for the whole period of the therapeutic procedure. It is worth noting that the principal goal of the indirect communication is defined by Kierkegaard as *education* (Opdragelse)[13], namely an education to oneself, to a true self-relationship.

[12] Pap. Bd. VIII-2, København 1968. B 85, 24.

[13] Ibid., B 82, 12. It is worth noting that Freud uses the equivalent German notion – *Erziehung* – in order to define the principal goal of the therapeutic communication. See: S. Freud: Vorlesungen zu Einführung in die Psychoanalyse, in: S. Freud: *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. XI, Frankfurt/M., 451.

That the designated goal may not lose its relevance – its validity and topicality – for any person, says that the maieutist, insofar as he is engaged in the existential therapy, has to practice his own true self-relationship in and through the indirect communication. Kierkegaard points out in this regard various acts and communicative modes providing realization of such a practice, among them – double reflection, reduplication, irony, and already mentioned self-restrain as a constitutive principle of a therapeutic being-with the other. Let me stress: it is by restraining himself from any authoritarian influence in communication that the existential maieutist *both* practices his true self-relation *and* (potentially) has to reach his addressee.

Both antinomies point out thus an insecure, unstable, *unfounded* character of the existential therapy. Nevertheless they should not be regarded as a sign of its failure or inconsistency. Rather, they indicate that the concept of the subject the therapeutic process proceeds from is not the classical one given the classical modernity understands the subject in terms of representation and self-representation. In opposition to the classical vision, Kierkegaard's existential analysis shows that the self is characterized by the multiple forms of self-concealment, self-hiding or suppression (Freud would call it Verdrängung). All of them are conceived by Kierkegaard ultimately as the different forms of existential self-deception described as a complex *unobjectifiable* process which remains unconscious for the existing individual. The analogy with Freud is indeed striking here. Both thinkers thematized certain unconscious transformations as they manifest themselves in different psychological and behavioral symptoms. One can recall the judgment of Kierkegaard given by Jaspers in this regard in his famous work *Psychology of Worldviews* (in the so called "Referat Kierkegaards"). While recognizing the remarkable analogy between Kierkegaard and Freud, Jaspers stresses at the same time that "with all the analogies ... the repressed forces in Freud are the lowest (sexual) ones whereas in Kierkegaard the highest ones (the wish of the person to become transparent for herself)"[14]. However it is worth highlighting that from the point of view of the problem of the subject Kierkegaard and Freud are to be seen as principally like-minded thinkers who congenially contribute to destruction and radical rethinking of the classical image of the subject in contemporary thought. "Congenially" implies here a very particular *practical* way of their respective rethinking of the subject since both of them – independently from each other – outlined their new vision of the subject in frame of an ultimately unobjectifiable therapeutic process (that is as a questionable and requested part of this process).

In Kierkegaard's version, the existential therapy has to do with the confrontation between the two forces in the existing individual: his will to become transparent for himself on the one hand and his escaping a

[14] In German: "bei aller Analogie [sind] die verdrängten Kräfte bei Freud gleichsam die untersten (sexuellen) bei Kierkegaard die höchsten (das Sich-durchsichtigwerdenwollen der Persönlichkeit)". See: K. Jaspers: *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin 1919, 373.

disclosure on the other. Due to its dynamics and dialectics, the confrontation is never fully comprehensible and as such it constitutes a genuine intrigue of the being of the self. Being constituted in this way the self cannot be ever identical with self-consciousness. From the point of view of such a deeply controversial image of the subject the classical interpretation of the subject in terms of consciousness and representation is unmasked as an existential *fiction*. At the same time, the new image has an *antinomic* character in Kierkegaard in the sense that the becoming-apparent or becoming-conscious is viewed by him (and by Freud as well) as an indispensable imperative for the existing individual. The existential therapy has then apparently to follow the imperative and to connect the therapeutic effect with the clear self-consciousness whereas the being of the subject is exposed to an inevitable existential dramatism just because this being cannot be reduced to the self-givenness of the subject of representation.

The very fact that Kierkegaard holds to the ideal of becoming-transparent-for-oneself can be interpreted in different ways, for instance in two opposite ways: as a sign of his adherence to the Enlightenment philosophy on the one hand and as a trace of a certain religious experience on the other hand. In the context of my paper, I see it yet as justified and promising to outline another interpretation of Kierkegaard's approach. To my mind, the designated antinomic image of the subject points out that the existential therapy has to do with the *relationship* between representation and the un-representable. Being more specific, what is supposed to be concerned in/by the existential therapy is the relationship between the subject's capability of representation and the Unrepresentability of the subject's being. Such interpretation allows us not only to reckon Kierkegaard among the pioneers of the hermeneutic approach in psychotherapy, but also to ascribe to him a certain critical vision of this approach. Traditionally, the hermeneutic approach in psychotherapy is understood as an approach, according to which the psychic discomfort or suffering has a meaning which develops beyond the natural determinism since it is rooted in the actual history of person's life and therefore requires an interpretation that is a hermeneutic approach. After the critical vision of Kierkegaard which is implied in his antinomic understanding both of the therapeutic process and of the subject, the mastership of the existential therapy consists not in the interpretation as such, but in the use of Hermeneutics as a *negative* method – "negative" in the sense that the process of interpretation must always refer to the *a-hermeneutic* that is to the self which in its being cannot be comprehended by any linguistic representation (or by any phenomenalizing).

P. S. My presentation started with the recognition of the unrest caused by Kierkegaard's writings. In a sense, what was said was an attempt to share this feeling.

ANXIOUS SPIRITS – PNEUMATOLOGY IN HEIDEGGER, PAUL, AND KIERKEGAARD

Hans Ruin[1]

Abstract

The concept of spirit, *aand*, is central in Kierkegaard's thinking, in particular in The Concept of Anxiety. Yet, with few exceptions this theme has not been explicitly explored in the commentaries. It points back to his deep connection to the Letters of St Paul, that remain an unexplored source for our understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophical spirituality. The text introduces how the philosophical problem of spirit has obtained a new role and interest in phenomenology and post-phenomenological thinking, especially through the work of Derrida. Through Heidegger's reading of Paul it then returns to the Pauline Letters for a detailed interpretation of spirit, pneuma, in Paul. It is shown to emerge as a way of conceptualizing the peculiar temporality of passage and transition within a tradition, and thus as having to do with trans-generational communication. In conclusion it argues for the further importance of this source for our understanding of Kierkegaard.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, St Paul, Spirit, Pneuma, Concept of Anxiety, Faith.

> "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power".
>
> *St Paul, 1st Cor: 2*

> "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..."
>
> *St Paul, 1st Cor: 15*

> "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh".
>
> *St Paul, 1st Cor: 12*

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Introduction

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard goes further than in any of his other writings in exploring the being of human existence as *spirit*, as *aand*. The animal is described as not experiencing anxiety precisely because it is not determined as "spirit".[2] As a concept, however, and in contrast to "anxiety" that has a more immediate contemporary applicability, the role and meaning of *spirit* is not expounded as such in the book. It functions as a fundamental and organizing concept, but is not interpreted and explored in its own right. Human being is said to be both body and soul, and kept together by *spirit*. It is also in the form of *spirit* that human existence can balance the temporal and the eternal. In the end *spirit* emerges the defining characteristic that separates the Greeks from Christians. The "genius" is described as one who is unable to fully access the domain of faith precisely by not being fully *spiritual*, for "only spirit is established through spirit", as he writes in Chapter III: § 3.

In an essay from 2001, *Spirit and temporality in the Concept of Anxiety*, Arne Grøn, as one of the very few interpreters that have tried to explicitly address this theme, raises the fundamental question: what is *spirit* in Kierkegaard?[3] *The concept of anxiety*, Grøn writes, is not a book about the concept of spirit, but it is a book "showing the significance of the concept of spirit".[4] In his attempt to explicate the meaning of this notion, Grøn turns to the problem of time and temporality in Kierkegaard. Human existence is a synthesis of temporal and eternal. Spirit must be explored as the intersection of these temporal structures. The temporality of existence is an intersection of both, it is in-finite in its self-relation to time, but it must also be understood as the "movement of radical finitude". In combining these movements, Grøn writes: "we can describe it as a transcendence of time (infinitude) that takes place in time by relating to time (finitude)". In the last section of his essay, Grøn also come upon the question of spirit and *history*. For in Kierkegaard, spirit is essentially connected to history, to temporality as history, as a finite exposure to the passage of time.

This is just a brief summary of Grøn's exposition of the problem. His essay is important in that it brings to our attention the relevance, and even necessity of thinking through this concept in Kierkegaard. His way of accessing it goes by way of a systematic reading of the problem of time, of the temporal and the eternal, and their possible fusion in a momentaneous, historical temporal structure. The reading is inspired by Heidegger, who himself partly learned to use these concepts through his creative appropriation of Kierkegaard in the German translations. What Grøn does not try to do in this essay, however, is to explore the

2 Caput I: § 5, in Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 4, Gjentagelsen; Frygt og bæven; Philosophiske smuler; Begrebet angest, København: Gad, 1997, 348, and in: *The Concept of Anxiety*, transl. A. Hannay, New York: Norton & Comp 2014, 51.

3 "Spirit and Temporality in The Concept of Anxiety", *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook*, 2001: 128–140.

4 Ibid., 130.

history and historicity of the concept of *spirit* itself outside the space of Kierkegaard's usage. But in order to understand how it makes sense, also in the writings of Kierkegaard, I believe it is motivated to examine more closely how it has emerged and developed over time, and how it has been transformed into a philosophical *topos* in its own right. For even though, as Grøn notes, the concept of *spirit/Geist/Aaand* from a certain perspective may seem old-fashioned and strange, it is in fact a central trope also in modern thought, not just in the work of Hegel, but also in and through phenomenology.

When exploring the meaning and history of *spirit* we inevitably confront the intersection between philosophy and theology. In particular we come across the writings of St Paul, as perhaps the foremost writer on *spirit – pneuma* in Greek – in the entire Western tradition. The scarcity of interest in the philosophical importance of Paul for Kierkegaard is a notable lacuna in Kierkegaard scholarship. Kierkegaard never devotes an extensive analysis to Paul, but he refers to the Pauline *Letters* throughout his writings. Together with Luther and Hegel, Paul is the single most quoted author in his works and papers. And unlike his references to philosophical sources, his references to Paul are almost unanimously positive and non-critical. Paul is course often mentioned in the commentaries, and some commentators have noted throughout the years that there is a distinct Pauline tonality in his thinking. Still, up until today there does not seem to have been a single consistent attempt to explore in its full width the impact of Paul for the philosophical orientation of Kierkegaard's thinking and writing, despite the fact that at least two of his works took their title directly from Paul, *Fear and Trembling* and *The thorn in the Flesh*.

What I present here is not an attempt to fill this gap. I will not try to recapitulate the many possible and fascinating details of Kierkegaard's Paul, nor the full scope of the Pauline Kierkegaard. After an introduction to how the concept of spirit has re-emerged in philosophy, notably in Derrida, the text is primarily devoted to accessing from an existential-phenomenological platform the meaning of *the spiritual* or *pneumatological* in Paul. Toward the end I return with some remarks on Kierkegaard and Paul in the light of the presented reading of the *Letters*. Like Arne Grøn, I will use Heidegger as a lever to open the question of the spiritual. But instead of going through the general problem of time and temporality I will consult his lectures on religion that were held in 1921, at a time when he was closer to Kierkegaard then perhaps ever before or after, and where the problem of *spirit/Geist* is given a first phenomenological definition.[5]

[5] The context of the material presented here is an ongoing research project on phenomenology and religion where I have mostly concentrated on the Pauline Letters, picking up the thread from Heidegger's lectures. This attempt to interpret Paul philosophically has had a deep resonance also in recent times, in books by Agamben, Zizek, Badiou and Caputo, to mention the most important, which has contributed to bringing Paul again to the center of contemporary philosophical interest. For a more extensive background to this material and my own understanding, see e. g.: "Faith, Grace,

I

In 1987 Derrida published the essay *On Spirit*, *De l´esprit*, with the subtitle *Heidegger and the Question*. The reference to "the question" was intentionally ambiguous. This was a time when the discussion about Heidegger's politics had recently exploded again, and Derrida had been invited to speak at a conference where the theme was "Heidegger and the open questions". He chose to address these open questions, not straightforward, but rather obliquely through the interpretation of a theme that hitherto had received minimal attention in the literature on Heidegger, namely that of *spirit*, *Geist*.[6]

The standard conception at that point was that "Geist" belonged to an older philosophical-humanist vocabulary, from which Heidegger had departed. Polemicizing against this simplified reading, Derrida showed that whereas in *Being and Time* Heidegger distanced himself from the use of "spirit" as a way of describing and analyzing human existence, together with that of the "psyche" and "subject", he in fact returned again to this vocabulary only a few years later, in the "Rectoral address", but also in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and in the interpretations of Hölderlin and Trakl. The topic of Derrida's analysis was then clear: namely to determine the meaning of and rationale behind this re-introduction of *Geist* as a philosophical-political category in the work of Heidegger from the early thirties onward.

With his book Derrida had opened the way toward a deeper questioning of the role and meaning of the *spiritual* in philosophy and in rationality. We could say that he had made *pneumatology* valid again as philosophical and phenomenological concern. In retrospect we can also see how in the context of his own work it pointed the way toward his subsequent preoccupation with the problem of the *ghost*, as the other facet of *Geist*, which he developed in particular in *Specters of Marx* some years later, and which would continue to reverberate in remarks on *revenants* and *hauntings* in the subsequent later writings.

When Derrida wrote *On Spirit*, Heidegger's lectures on the phenomenology of religion from 1921 had not yet been released from the archive. In these lectures Heidegger does in fact address the Christian and Pauline concept of *pneuma*, in a way that opens a trajectory that was not available to Derrida at the time. Notable in this context is also that this was a time when Heidegger was most intensively preoccupied with the writings of Kierkegaard. Another book that came a few years after Derrida's analysis, and that was also partly inspired by it, was a

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and the Destruction of Tradition: A Hermeneutic-Genealogical Reading of the Pauline Letters", in: *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 2010, 11, 1: 16–34, and also: "Circumcising the Word: Derrida as Reader of Paul", in: P. Frick (ed.) *Paul in the Grip of Philosophers*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 71–93.

6 J. Derrida: *De l´esprit. Heidegger et la question*, Paris: Galilée, 1987, in English translation by J. Bennington & R. Bowlby: *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989.

study by Alan Olson, *Hegel and Spirit. Philosophy as Pneumatology*.[7] It traces Hegel's understanding and use of spirit to its religious-political background, to Luther in particular and generally to a pietist religious Lutheranism that was part of Hegel's background. By "spirit" Hegel is here said to seek to think the philosophical vehicle of "infinite mediation and differentiation". Olson does not pursue the topic back to Paul, but stresses the religious inheritance of the concept, back to the (Pauline) Luther.

The studies of Derrida and Olson confirm the relevance of exploring the narrative of Western rationalism and rationality as also narratives of *spirit*, and thus as part of a *pneumatological* inheritance. Such an historical exploration is of particular relevance when one considers the particular aura that surrounds this concept also in Kierkegaard, and more generally in phenomenology. To speak of the spirituality of reason is not a neutral. When it is recalled and put to use, as in the examples just mentioned, it is as the name for the highest possibility and potentiality of reason. It is notable that in Husserl's later writings, for example his lecture on the Crisis of European Sciences from 1935, spirit is recalled when rationality appears threatened by itself, as if by the inner repression, loss, and even death.[8]

In the introductory remarks to his course on phenomenology of religion from 1921, Heidegger insists that the phenomenological question of method is not a question of the appropriate methodological system, but of *access*, how to find the way to a "factical" life experience.[9] A phenomenology of religious life, he writes, should not be a theory *about* the religious, conceived of as an *object* of study in the standard mode of a science of religion, but rather as *a way of entering in understanding* the religious as a form of meaning-fulfilment or *enactment*.

In the introductory remarks to the course he stresses that the phenomenological question of method is not about the appropriate methodological system, but one of *access*, that passes through factical *(faktische*) life experience. A phenomenology of religious life, he writes, is not a theory *about* the religious, conceived of as an object of study in the

7 See A. Olson: *Hegel and the Spirit. Philosophy as Pneumatology*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. Throughout the enormous secondary literature on Hegel there has been surprisingly little attention to the specific role and meaning of "spirit" itself. In his book Olson argues that the reference to and use of spirit in Hegel's thinking is inseparable from what we could call a modern "pneumatological" tradition within Christianity, that he dates back primarily especially the katechetical Luther. In Hegel's discourse a pietistic pneumatological Lutheranism is transformed into a philosophical narrative of the dynamic life of the concept, in a process of "infinite mediation and differentiation".

8 First published as an appendix to *Husserliana VI*, "Die Krisis des europäsichen Menschentums und die Philosophie" (Haag: Nijhoff 1954), p. 314–348.

9 M. Heidegger: *Gesamtaugabe*, Bd. 60, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 1995), in English translation by M. Fritsch as *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004).

standard mode of a science of religion, but rather as *a way of entering*, in understanding, the religious as a type of meaning-fulfillment or enactment, in German *Vollzug*. It is not a psychological theory of religious experiences, but an explication of the *meaning* of religion, which therefore does not immediately need to take sides along confessional lines. Instead the confessional, as the meaning of devotion, is itself among the phenomena to be investigated. Nor does it take a definitive stance in regard to the distinction between rationality and irrationality, as if the religious, once and for all, could be located in the latter. The phenomenological understanding, as Heidegger rightly emphasizes, lies beyond this distinction. To such a phenomenological analysis belongs the preparedness to allow the basic, organizing concepts to remain undecided. It is on the condition that we do not force a conceptual structure onto a phenomenon that this phenomenon can begin to speak and have sense on its own terms. Such an explication can also permit the non-understandable to be understandable, precisely by letting-be [*belassen*] its non-understandability. Speaking in the terms of Husserl, we should try to investigate these phenomena by "bracketing" their realist, or metaphysical, implications.

Referring to the contemporary interest philosophy and phenomenology of religion in general, and in regard to Rudolf Otto's then recently published book *Das Heilige* (from 1917), Heidegger comments on the attempt to delineate the religious sphere with reference to the category of "the irrational" (*das Irrationalen*), in contrast to the rational:

> "But with these concepts nothing is said as long as one does not know the meaning of the rational. The concept of the irrational should be determined from the contrast to the concept of the rational, which still remains notoriously unclear. This conceptual couple should therefore be abolished. The phenomenological understanding, according to its basic meaning, lies completely outside this contrast, which only has a very restricted validity, if any".

Heidegger's main interest is the sense of *time* that animates the Pauline discourse, which he explores by focusing on the formulations of a life in faith as one of hope, waiting, and awakedness, of an open, finite existential horizon for the unexpected.

Toward the end of his lectures Heidegger himself also briefly addresses the problem of *pneuma* in Paul. He speaks of it in the context of its "Bezugsinn", its "relational significance", or the meaning of its relation to world. *Pneuma*, just like *psuche* and *sarx* (flesh), should not be seen as entities, he argues. Instead they should be seen as "zeitliche Güter", and temporal goods, to the extent that they are lived in and through temporality. The "original Christian life" that he traces in the Pauline letters is one that cannot be interpreted with the help of categories that designate a continuous harmonic life, but involves a sense of "being shattered". In this context Heidegger also rejects the idea of Paul as a mystical "pneumatician" (*Pneumatiker*) and of man as divinity that had been suggested by the biblical scholar Richard Reitzenstein in a study on Hellenistic

mystery religions. In terms of the "objective historical circumstances" the thesis may be valid Heidegger says, but in terms of how *pneuma* functions in the Pauline text it adds nothing to the interpretation.

Taking instead his lead from the famous quotation, cited above, from 1 Cor 2.10 f. of how it is through *pneuma* that the depth of God is sought, and that it is only through spirit and not through worldly wisdom that understanding can be had, Heidegger states that "pneuma bei Paulus ist die Vollzugsgrundlage, aus der das Wissen selbst entspringt", that *pneuma* is the basis of enactment from which knowledge itself arises.[10] For the same reason, he says, what is essential in Paul is not to *be* spirit, but to *have* spirit, *pneuma echein*. For Heidegger it is thus important to draw a sharp line between the mystics, who use artificial means to access the divine, whereas the Christian position is to remain "awake and vigilant".

Recent critics have pointed out the lacunae in Heidegger's understanding of the historical situation of the Jewish communities within which Paul was formulating his discourse.[11] There is a kind prevailing Lutheran ideological bias in Heidegger's preoccupation with the very idea of "original Christianity". An interpretation of the Pauline letters today needs to transcend the horizon of Paul as "Christian" in the sense that this word receives only later. Paul was, and this has been become more and more of an accepted view in the confessionally unfettered literature, primarily a Jewish reformer of the inherited Judaic religion, who experienced his own historical situation and teaching as truthful to this tradition and its inner meaning at a decisive historical juncture. It is also only from this perspective that the genuine significance of his pneumatology makes sense. This is not the case in Heidegger's interpretation, which is why the reading of Paul I propose here goes beyond the horizon of Heidegger's conclusions, while relying on his basic hermeneutic approach.

II

Pneuma in the Pauline letters is not *one* thing. It is the principle frequently recalled by Paul in order to secure the unity of his own message, as when he writes in 1 Cor 12.13, of how we are all by "one *pneuma* … baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, etc". *Pneuma* is here the metonymic figure of the unity of the congregation, as a unity for which he is struggling, at times desperately, as the Letters clearly demonstrate. But the fact that *pneuma* is recalled to forge a unified congregation, does not make it itself into a unified entity. On the contrary, it works along several parallel trajectories in the Letters, as both a manifestation of God, and as identical to his essence (2 Kor 3.17), as both a

10 *The Phenomenology of Religiuos Life*, transl. M. Fritsch & J. Gosetti-Ferencei, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004, 88.

11 For this argument, see W. Blanton: *Displacing Christian Origins. Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007.

means of human knowledge to reach the truth (Eph 6.17), and as truth itself (ibid), as a source of goodness (Gal 5.22), as distinct forms of comportment (Rom 8.15), and as an independent force that takes possession of life. It moves throughout the Letters as a resource from which his discourse draws support, in and through which it inhales and exhales the force needed to communicate its message. *Pneuma* thus appears as partly a performative concept, as it is recalled at decisive junctures, to secure the force and the legitimacy of the discourse itself – as when he says (in 2 Kor 4.13) that he has "the same *pneuma* of faith as mentioned in the scripture … we too believe and therefore we too speak", and also that what is spoken is itself secure as a communication of *pneuma* (2 Cor 3.6).

Pneuma occurs frequently in the Letters as an oppositional concept, in opposition to matter, to body, to the finite in general, and directly in opposition toward death. "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit" (Rom 8.9). Also in Romans it is said that "if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the spirit do mortify the deed of the body, you shall live" (8.13). *Pneuma* is thus fixed as a name for that which *survives*, but also for the very possibility of survival, as a possible victory over mortality. What it promises is that there is survival, that there is a way to leave the earthly bonds, and thus to liberate oneself. The ultimate symbol of this promise is Jesus, who is taken to have vanquished death, and to have done so precisely in virtue of *pneuma* (Rom 1.4).

Leaving aside the myth of resurrection, and the direct contrast between a supposedly atemporal spirit and temporal matter, we can see how the *pneumatic* thus carries a more general promise of a life liberated from destruction and also from being enclosed and entrapped, not outside time, but precisely in time, in a transformed time. In 2 Kor 3.17 there is a important passage that expands the conception of spirit in this direction. It speaks of how "where the *pneuma* of the Lord is, there is freedom". The whole context of this passage deserves close consideration, for it pushes the meaning of the *pneuma* toward another contrast, which in the end is more important than the one with mortal flesh, namely with *literal tradition*. Paul writes here of how the standard reader of the "old covenant", i. e., the inherited body of Jewish literature, has a "veil over his face", a veil that can only be lifted by the working of Christ as the vehicle of spirit. In other words, *pneuma* is also the means of interpretation, a received capacity of gaining a supposedly more genuine access to tradition.

From here we can see the real significance of the fact that in many passages in Paul, spirit is not primarily contrasted with body or flesh (which it is too of course), but with "the letter", as when he writes in 2 Cor 3.6, that it is not of the letter but of the spirit, *ou grammatos alla pneumatos*. It is through spirit that a reader is supposedly enabled to move beyond the surface of what is read. Spirit is thus not simply directed *against* the *gramma*, but it is rather what works in the service of the *gramma*, in the sense of "what is really said". It is, again and in short, a capacity for receiving tradition. It is a capacity to speak and commu-

nicate a message that is at once tradition and in excess of tradition, as the second covenant is not "of the letter, but of the *pneuma*" (2 Cor 3.6).

The same passage is followed by the remarkable conclusion: "for the letter kills, but the *pneuma* gives life". Here the transition is established seamlessly between the problem of life and survival, and the very mode of how tradition is transmitted. And *pneuma* is at the heart of it all. If we abide by the letter we die, whereas the spirit will guarantee that we live. What then is this *sur-vival*, for which the pneumatic reception is so central? How is it that we can die in and of a literal reception of tradition, whereas a pneumatic reception of it will enable it to live in us, and we through it? We need to phrase the question in this way in order to truly see what kind of hermeneutics is at work in Paul, and how his preoccupation with the *pneumatic* is in fact motivated by an attempt to orchestrate the destruction and the resurrection of tradition at once. In the end, the resurrection of Christ works as a metonymical promise of another resurrection, which is the resurrection of the individual and the community within the transmission of an inheritance. Or as he writes in Rom 8.11:

> "But if the *pneuma* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he … shall also give life to your mortal bodies by his *pneuma*" [transl. modified].

The extent to which *pneuma* essentially has to do with how tradition is transmitted is highlighted most visibly perhaps in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 2. This is the passage where Paul presents himself as someone who comes not with "lofty speech or wisdom (*sophia*)", but with words of *pneuma* and power or strength (*dynamis*), that should guarantee that the listeners do not "rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God". This pneumatically secured wisdom is then qualified in a temporal-historical way, by saying that it is "not of this time" (*ou tou aionos toutou*) but that it comes "before the ages" (*pro ton aionon*). This teaching or wisdom is then again qualified by *pneuma*, for it is what has been revealed through the *pneuma* (*dia tou pneumatos*), which is then followed by the formulation quoted earlier, of how the *pneuma* is what searches everything. In other words, *pneuma* is a means and vehicle of knowledge, communicated and transmitted through time, and that acts so as to preserve what was there, but what the passage of time itself also tends to forget and dissimulate. Its knowledge is free, and it is also what brings about freedom. It is a force from ancient times that brings the present in touch with the past, to the extent that this present is already opened to the past.

It is also at this particular point that the logic of Paul's pneumatology reaches its most intense moment in the entire corpus of the letters, as he writes of how we are "taught by the spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" (*alla en didaktois pneumatos pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes*). What he is reaching for here – this is the interpretation I am suggesting – is an articulation of the ideal of a truthful transmission of tradition – a tradition that can only be taught

from within itself, in accordance with this itself, to those who are already open to it, and yet in contrast to the current cultivation of its message in the world.

In this particular passage readers have often stopped short before what appears to be a strict demarcation between the *spirit of the world* (*pneuma tou kosmou*) and the spirit of god (*pneuma tou theou*), ending up in fruitless disputes about to what extent Paul is pointing beyond this world and its obligation, and toward an entirely different world, which must then be countered with all his remarks of how we should still be committed to this world, to a love and concern for our immediate community, etc. But this discussion leads away from the underlying motive of the entire narrative, namely to secure – metaphorically and poetically – that the senses of his community remains open to the possibility of living the truth of its own tradition through time, across and against the constraints of the present.

In the following and final passage of this letter on learning, interpretation and transmission, the different types of intelligence are differentiated in a remarkable way. For here Paul writes that the ordinary human soul (*psuche*) does not reach into the *pneuma* of God, for these truths are only accessible through *pneuma*, as the supreme and indisputable source of certainty. For the pneumatic man – he adds – is judged by no one. And in the last sentence he asks how we can reach into the *reason*, the *nous*, of God himself, answering that this is possible through the spirit and reason of Christ. For we have, he concludes, the mind or reason – the *nous* – of Christ.

The very formulation of "having the mind of Christ" (*noun Christou echoumen*), as a secured means of access to the *nous* of God - can easily invite a reading of Paul as a mystic, in particular as he has earlier in the same passage referred to the "mysterious wisdom of God" (*en mysterio sophian theou*). But as Heidegger rightly points out in his lectures, as quoted above, it is misleading to read Paul as a mystic in a conventional sense of the mystery cults. His remarks are to the point, and they lead in the direction of the interpretation that I have tried to develop here. Yet, in his urge to rid Paul of the label *Pneumatiker*, Heidegger shuns away from the possibility of truly assessing the weight and implication of the pneumatic in the Pauline letters, and thus also of reaching a more philosophically reflected understanding of the pneumatic as such.

Once we have secured access to the phenomenological meaning of the pneumatological, as a poietics of historical existence and transmission of inheritance, we can also go further into the edifice of Pauline theology, and discern its structure. I am thinking in particular of the specific antagonistic framing of the pneumatic that runs through his discourse, where the *pneuma* is consistently acted out not just against the *letter*, but also against the law (*nomos*). An important passage that illustrates this constellation we find in Galatians 5.18, where it is said: "if you be led by the *pneuma*, you are not under the law". Not to be under the law, is not however the same thing as having left the law behind or to be law-less. On the contrary, and this is central to the Pauline message, that

it is only by not being subjected to the law that the genuine meaning of the law can be fulfilled. Or as it is written in Romans 8.4: "that the righteousness (*to dikaoima*) of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit". So again we see how *pneuma* works to secure the access to the genuine meaning of the tradition, against the plain obedience, which looks only to the current practice and interpretation. As a means of hermeneutic access, it establishes a link between the past and the present.

The same logic characterizes the passages that contrast *pneuma* and *gramma*, spirit and writing, that occur on several occasions, e. g., in Romans 7.6, that speaks of the delivery from the law as under a spell of death, and how life is made possible again not through the "oldness of the letter" (*palaioteti grammatos*) but through "the newness of pneuma" (*kainoteti pneumatos*). Here again the temporal dimension gives the clue to the interpretation. *Pneuma* is a newness of the old, that which comes before and through the times, whereas the letter is the oldness of the new. While the letter – that which is written - could seem to carry the weight and the truth of tradition and thus of what is living, it is in fact an inheritance of death. In contrast, the *pneuma* is what guarantees the life and liberation of the old, but of an oldness which in its newness is older than the old.

The event of Christ is for Paul ultimately a hermeneutic event, one that makes the ancient doctrines legible and valid again. The pneumatic understanding of this event and of its tradition is meant to secure the access to this inheritance in understanding. Christ guarantees this access through his resurrection. The defining moment of his existence is not the fact that for a moment he was dead, and then again living, but that he, in and through his example, has shown how the tradition can become alive again as a promise. This is precisely the matrix according to which Paul understands the relation to the tradition and the law (*nomos*), that it has become imbued with death, but that it can again – through *pneuma* – becoming living, and thus also remain living.

With this in mind we can also make better sense of some of the most complex and troublesome statements on the relation to existing (Jewish) tradition. When we read in Romans 2.29 that "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the *pneuma*, and not in the letter" this makes perfect sense in relation to the suggested interpretation. It is not through the outer, material mark, nor through obedience to the written law, that one is true to one's tradition, but this is something that takes place through the connection between the *pneuma* of the law and the *pneuma* of the individual, in other words that one experiences oneself as attached, joined, and committed to one's human-intellectual inheritance. This passage should not primarily be read in the context of the controversies between Jewish and Christian, where it has worked its disastrous effects for centuries, for this is not really what is at stake. What is a stake is – again – the attempt to grasp poietically the nature of a living bond to tradition, first of all for the Jews, and indirectly for anyone who is able to access it.

I have tried to show how we can and should read Pauline pneumatics as in fact a discourse primarily concerned with the problem of tradition and inheritance, and thus of the temporal condition of understanding. But it is indubitably the case that a central aspect of Paul's pneumatology is one of the *triumph* of life over death. In Romans 8.2 he writes that it is the *pneuma* of life in Christ that has liberated me from the law of sin and death. And in Romans 6.23 the gift of God is said to be "eternal life" (*zoen aionion*), and to be "pneuamatically minded" (*phronema pneumatos*) is equated with *life*, as opposed to being "bodily/carnally minded", which leads to death. The examples could be multiplied. *Pneuma* is connected to life, and to the possibility of triumph over death. It is a word for *survival*, for the securing of survival, but also a name for that which *survives*. Tradition and legacy presupposes death. It is a law of history, that the testator shall die, but also through his testament *sur-vive*.[12] The 2. Cor 4.11 speaks of the life of Jesus that is to be made manifest in the mortal flesh, in other words it speaks of an infusion of life into the mortal body, and there is "victory of death" (1 Cor 15.54).

But from whence does this life come? What is Paul here speaking about? A way of phenomenologically understanding this statement is that he is poetizing the experience of survival of an original impulse of life and capacity, that moves through time and history, travelling across the law of death, as the genuine memory of what was originally promised. The *pneuma* is not just a position from within which the individual subject speaks, but it is the attempt to name that in tradition, which survives as a possibility for an unlimited future. It is the life in death, and the life across death. In 2 Cor 3.6 it is said that they have become "ministers of the new testament" (*diakonous diatekes*) not through the letter, but through the *pneuma* – for the letter kills, whereas *pneuma* gives life. Here again we can see that the caretaking of the tradition is made possible by spirit as sur-vival, as a principle of life.

When the Pauline letters refer to spirit/pneuma, they refer to a transgeneration and ancestral force, operating through tradition, thereby maintaining tradition. Paul transforms this inheritance, articulating spirit/pneuma explicitly as a hermeneutical experience, a key to not only the genuine inheriting of tradition, but as a way to permit the life of tradition to be operative in himself and in his community, through a dismantling of its inherited claim. This is also why he, as the carrier of a new and happy message, an *eu-angelos*, is also the one who must perform a "destruction" of that very same tradition. In 2 Cor 10.4 he writes: "I destroy buildings of thought" – *logismous kathairtontes*, in latin: *concilia destruentes*. This destruction is here performed by an individual who readily acknowledges himself to have a bit of madness in him (*aphrosynes*), 2 Cor 11.1, something that should serve the power and the spirit of a god, who also grants this power to his servant.

12 On this theme, see also the supposedly apocryphic letter to the Hebrews 9.16.

In a final and concluding section I will now return to Kierkegaard, in order to point to some ways in which this interpretation of Paul and the problem of spirit/*pneuma* can permit us to access his thinking.

III

One of the philosophically most dense passages in all of Kierkegaard's works is the introduction to Chapter III in *The Concept of Anxiety*. The topic here is the emergence of anxiety through a failure to recognize one's sin. Kierkegaard recalls his previous analysis of human existence as the fusion of body and soul, carried by a *spirit* that stands in direct proportion to anxiety. He adds to this that anxiety should be understood as the "moment" or actually the "moment of vision", the *œjeblik*. The temporal category of the "moment of vision" is here introduced as the key to understanding spirituality. Over the following pages he critically discusses how modern (Hegelian) thinking has ultimately failed to conceptualize the problem of "passage" or "transition", making it into a dialectical game. In the Platonic problem of "the sudden", *to exaifnes*, he finds the most advanced attempt in classical metaphysics to articulate the problem of passage, of fusion of being and non-being, and thus of the very dynamics of the temporal. But in the end, he concludes, the Greek thinkers were not able to think temporality either. And the reason for this was that they "lacked the concept of spirit".[13] In a footnote to this passage he notes that *The New Testament* has a "poetic transcription" (*poetisk Omskrivelse*) of the moment of vision, namely when Paul says that the world will perish "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (*en atomoi kai en ripe ophtalmou*). But what Kierkegaard does not say is that this passage from 1st Cor: 15, is not just a poetic transcription of "the moment of vision", but the very creation of this literal trope, as one of a number of key concepts that he takes directly from his reading of Paul.

The consequence of this correlation has a deeper resonance for our argument. The inability of the Greek tradition to understand the concept of spirit is directly connected by Kierkegaard to its inability to understand the temporality of the moment. We are thus led to the conclusion that a key to Kierkeegard's understanding of spirit is also to be found in Paul. On the following page he states that as soon as spirit is posited there is also the moment, and vice versa. The temporality of the moment and the spiritual are mutually implicative. Taking his starting point in a passage from the *Letter to the Ephesians* (4.19) on "those being past feeling" or literally "without pain" (*apelgekotes*), he then goes on to argue how the emergence of genuine spirituality produces an intensified contrast *vis-à-vis* the non-spiritual. The non-spiritual person can mimic spirit, but only as empty talk, because it does not speak *in virtue of spirit*, or through the *force* of spirit (*i Kraft af Aand*).

The examples of how Kierkegaard forges his own understanding of the spiritual in proximity to Paul could be multiplied. Here I will only

13 Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 4, Gjentagelsen; Frygt og bæven; Philosophiske smuler; Begrebet angest, København: Gad 1997, 391.

recall one more dimension of this larger problematic, namely the distinction between genius and prophet. This comparison is also first articulated in *The Concept of Anxiety*, in the following section in the same chapter (III: 2). The genius, he writes, is characterized by subjectivity, and by its understanding of its own exterior as "destiny". In its understanding of destiny the genius represents a superior position in relation to the non-spiritual. But having understood the world as destiny is not to have reached fully into an understanding of providence and grace. For this requires an experience of sin, that is only available to the spiritual person. In *The Concept of Anxiety* this argument is not connected directly to Paul, even though the whole context is clearly guided by a Pauline sensibility. But if we turn to the later essay *On the Difference between Genius and Apostle*, the extent to which Paul serves as a model for his own writing and philosophical orientation becomes evident. The genius is here someone who remains on the surface of things, who works with aesthetic means. The apostle, on the other hand, is not of the aesthetic, nor of the philosophical order, but it is someone who speaks with and through the authority of the divine.[14]

To speak with spirit, as a spiritual thinker, is to think from within the experience of sin, anxiety, and the temporality of the moment. In short it is to speak from within the experience of *faith*. If we are to understand the meaning of the spiritual – of *Aand* – in Kierkegaard we need to go back to Paul. But this return to Paul does not mean that we stay in and with Paul or that we relinquish philosophy to theology or simply to a confessional comportment. On the contrary, and as I hope to have shown here, the meaning of the spiritual/*pneumatikos* in Paul is by no means settled. The spiritual is presented in the letters as a force that provides certainty and which gives authority to speak and to comport oneself. But the question remains what the true source of this force really is. I have argued that we can only begin to understand this if we read Paul as a thinker of the problem of tradition, of transmission, and thus of the historical. To read Paul in this way is not simply to apply a Heideggerian matrix to a theological thinker. Instead it amounts to showing how a certain problematic has already been operative from the start in the Pauline text, in ways that were not even fully apparent to Heidegger.

The theme of the spirit reaches Heidegger partly through Kierkegaard, as a pneumatological inheritance, that is concerned with inheritance as such. The *pneuma* is a name for that which travels and moves over generations, it is a name for that secret force that permits the new to strike a rift in the solid fabric of time, in order to release the full force of the temporal and historical itself. In all its hyperbolic certainty, it is therefore also a name for the vulnerability of freedom.

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14 Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 11, Lilien paa marken og fuglen under himlen, København: Gad, cop. 2006, 100.

RELIGIOUS *WIEDERHOLUNG*: SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND GIORGIO AGAMBEN

Rita Šerpytytė[1]

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to reveal the nihilistic sense of an experiential structure, which has been distinctively rooted in Western philosophical tradition. On the one hand, this hermeneutical analysis will be based on a certain conception of nihilism providing two theoretical models of nihilism – nihilism, which refers to the theory of *Überwindung*, and nihilism, associated to the idea of *différance*. On the other hand, it will be built on a certain (the so-called "onto-theological") pretext, which might be used for recognition of the structure of repetition in Western tradition of thinking, – i. e. a text fragment from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians Eph. I, 10 – the paradigmatic passage proposing this universal structure of repetition. Focused both on philosophy of Kierkegaard and Agamben, hermeneutical analysis will aim to disclose the separate invariants of such repetition as cases of explosion of the mentioned text fragment. The question is raised – what is it – the repetition? Where does its negativity lie? How does its nihilistic sense appear? How does the difference mediate in this process of revealing of negativity and nihilism? The article argues that *difference*, as a motion of negation representing nihilistic logic, can be treated both in formal and in realistic way. The treating of *difference* as real denying in Kierkegaard's and Agamben's thinking corresponds to the ontological rootedness of a same structure of the experience – the repetition.

Keywords: repetition, nihilism, *différance*, negativity, time.

The purpose of this article is to unfold the nihilistic sense of the structure of experience called "repetition", which has been established in Western philosophical tradition in a very distinctive way. Such a phrasing of the purpose, however, makes it necessary to outline some preliminary assumptions. On one hand, this hermeneutical analysis will be based on my own approach to the problem of nihilism, i. e. it will be based on a specific conception of nihilism. On the other hand, it will be built on a certain (the so-called "onto-theological") pretext, which is used in the Western tradition of thought to apprehend the structure of repetition.

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As it concerns the problem of nihilism, my underlying position is that the term of "nihilism" in Western philosophical tradition refers to two interconnected, but, nevertheless, different problematical configurations. In other words, from the point of view of contemporary post-metaphysical thought, it is possible to draw a distinction between two interrelated but, nonetheless, different interpretations of nihilism (theoretical models of nihilism). Nihilism in the first sense refers to the theory of *Überwindung*; nihilism in the second sense is associated to the idea of *différance*. The basis for segregation of these two theoretical meanings of nihilism lies in certain treatment of the motion of negation, which has the constitutional importance for nihilistic consciousness. Nihilism referred to by the theory of *Überwindung* establishes itself on the basis of negation understood in the classical meaning; nihilism referred to by the theory based on the idea of *différence* or the theory proposing primacy, preferentiality of *difference* (*différance*) establishes itself from the negation understood as *différance*. In the context of our discussion, *i.e.* in the context of the problem of negativity/nihilism, the second theory, *i.e.* the one based on the idea of *différance,* will be of primary importance[2]. Thus, it would be possible to say that the discussion concerning relationship between nihilism and repetition turns, in essence, to the discussion concerning relationship between difference and repetition.

At the same time, this preliminary conclusion might give an impression that we will focus entirely on the post-modern tradition, where the tandem of difference and repetition has become a paradigmatic figure of thought. And I mean here not only Gilles Deleuze, but other contemporary thinkers of difference, such as Derrida, Foucault, Vattimo, etc., as well. Yet in this case, my point of departure is not a formal orientation towards the post-modern tradition which exploits the concepts of difference and repetition, but some other pretext.

What I have in mind is one textual reference of a contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben to the Epistles of Apostle Paul, and, to be more precise, to the Paulinian Epistle to the Ephesians (Ef. 1, 10); this passage has been analysed in the book of Agamben *Il tempo che resta:*

> "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might *gather together in one all things* [or, to be closer to the Greek original: *recapitulate all things*] in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him ["*eis oikonomían tou plērōmatos tōn kairōn, anakephalaiōsasthai ta panta en tō cristō, ta epi tois ouranoís kai ta epi tēs gēs en autō*"]"[3].

In the opinion of Agamben, this passage is of such richness and capacity, that it could be seen as one of the foundational texts of Western culture. Such doctrines as *apocatastasis* of Origen and Leibniz, repetition (*ripresa*) of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche's eternal return, and Heidegger's *Wiederholung,* can be traced back to this Paulinian passage. These doc-

2 See R. Šerpytytė: *Nihilizmas ir Vakarų filosofija,* Vilnius: VU leidykla 2077.
3 G. Agamben: *Il tempo che resta,* Torino: Bollati Boringhieri 2005, 75.

trines are nothing else as the fragments of explosion of the aforementioned passage.

We should add that Agamben's conception of Messianic time could also be viewed as a case of such explosion; the same could be said about Richard Kearney's anatheistic interpretation of secularly sacral experience or about the figure of *revenant* in *Specters of Marx* of Derrida referred to by Agamben.

Thus, what is the repetition, where its negativity lies, and how its nihilistic sense reveals itself? What is the mediation of *différance* in this revelation of negativity and nihilism?

Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard provides the most articulate expression of the problematic nature of *repetition* in the thought of late modernity. While discussing faith, Kierkegaard analyses it as the structure of repetition of religious act, which is the highest existential motion. And in this perspective, the most important question turns out to be an inquiry concerning the very possibility of repetition: is repetition possible?

Considering the conditions of modernity, we would be obliged to acknowledge that the essential question in this case is the question concerning *approach* to experience. How is it possible to repeat a journey to Berlin? How is it possible to repeat the Abrahamic motion? How is it possible to recognise a *knight of faith?* This silently uttered and sometimes only intuited "how?" represents the complicated nature of the aforementioned approach in a very essential way. It's not without reason that in his treatise *Repetition* Kierkegaard points out to the fact that the

> "Repetition is a new category which is destined to be introduced in the future. Having some knowledge of the most recent philosophy and being not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, it is not difficult to see that it is precisely this category that explains the relationship between the doctrines of the Eleatic school and Heraclites, and that, to say truth, the repetition is precisely this phenomenon that has mistakenly been called mediation. ... There is no explanation in our age as to how mediation takes place, whether it results from the motion of two factors and in what sense it is already contained in them, or whether it is something new that is added, and, if so, how"[4].

Thus, Kierkegaard is looking for an alternative to the "disenchanted" modern mind/reason, by opposing to its motion of *mediation*. That alternative, however, is a *direct, unmediated* repetition of a certain experience. Thus, in order to examine the possibility and meaning of repetition, Kierkegaard makes a decision to repeat his journey to Berlin...

Yet one could not call this experiment of "repetition" undertaken by the hero of Kierkegaard/by his pseudonym *Constantin Constantius*, once he is again in Berlin, a success. To begin with an experience of going to "the same" building lightened with gas lamps and rooms fur-

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4 S. Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*, ed. and transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1983, 148–149.

nished in the same way... It is impossible to name *all* the details that create the field of apparently the same experience. The more Constatin Constantius describes that environment in more detail, the more it appears different... The multitude of details described in a scrupulous way should, as it would seem, to witness the repetition of what has happened, to prove that all is the same; but in reality it conveys something different. It is impossible to cover the totality of the past experience: in every case something would be missing and impossible to repeat. Thus, at the very beginning of his return to Berlin, C. C. has to admit: the repetition is impossible. And not to speak about his visit to the theatre which he left in a half an hour after the beginning of the performance, uttering the words: "there is no repetition". Kierkegaard in Constantin Constantius' person laughs at a tourist who is determined to "quickly visit" the famous places of Berlin: "*Das ganze Berlin,* just for four pennies". In that treatise, however, his very own attempt of repetition, in a very ironic way, turns to be a very similar search for *das ganze Berlin* in the belief of possibility to discover Berlin anew.

But as everyone knows, it is possible to detect the structure of *repetition* in other texts of Kierkegaard as well, not only in the aforementioned treatise: this structure is visible in his description of all existential stages or various – aesthetic, ethic, etc. – experiences. The question of *repetition* finds its most imperious expression in his *Fear and Trembling,* this time as a "problem" of the most radical experience, that of the repetition of faith. In the treatise *Fear and Trembling,* as in his *Repetition,* it is not difficult to discover the idea that faith is impossible to *mediate.* But is it possible that the repetition as unsuccessful experiment of a journey to Berlin would find its realisation/accomplishment while performing the Abrahamic motion? Is it really so "terribly easy" not only to understand Abraham, but also to match him by the very repetition of his motion of faith?

But is it really so much simpler and easier to "rise", "get back", i. e. to *repeat* the experience of faith in comparison to that of the "everydayness life"?

Even if such a "hierarchy" might seem quite strange, it is not "illogical". In other words, there is no contradiction here, or, to put in differently, the relationship between those two cases of repetition might seem illogical only from the first sight. After a closer look to the attempts of Kierkegaard, one can see that his *Wiederholung* might be written in order to show that here, in this everyday-life there is no place for repetition. There is no repetition without interruption of the transcendence, without absolutely *other,* without *difference.* This is why this "surprise", this paradox is possible; this is the reason why the repetition of the journey to Berlin is just an unsuccessful experiment, while the motion of a knight of faith is a *real* repetition of the journey of Abraham. Repetition, not the recollection of the past. Kierkegaard was the first one to notice in a very clear way the paradox of time of *repetition*, opposing it to recollection. *Repetition* is directed *forwards,* while recollection is directed *backwards.* It is possible to repeat only something that will

happen in the future, not something that has already happened. Thus, repetition is "recollection" forwards. Yet it is customary to believe that repetition is possible only in the case of something that has already happened, and as such, repetition is linked to the past tense. This is true, however, only while we think from the perspective of chronological time. Yet the Kiekegaardian existentially anticipating interpretation of repetition leads to the Christian context, *i. e.* to the Paulinian conception of time as *kairós.* The repetition is an interruption of *kairós* into human experience. And in this case, the future turns out to be the most important modus of time. As a consequence, one can speak of pre-conceived, anticipatory repetition of what "will happen" in the future. This is why this essentially Kierkegaardian attitude can be expressed in the postmodern style, affirming that "*Repetition* precedes". There are different kinds of repetition, though.

The experiential nature of *repetition* discussed by Kierkegaard becomes even clearer compared to the descriptions of epiphanies of Marcel Proust in his epopee of time. The well-known "Return to Venice" could provide an answer to Kierkegaard, that repetition is possible not merely in the case of religious existence. But why Marcel succeeds the repetition, while Constantin Constantius does not? One answer could be easily found in that very novel of Proust: "After all, I was not looking for two rough stone plates over which I had stumbled in the courtyard"[5]. Marcel is not conducting an "experiment" of his "return to Venice": "...it was this inevitable contingency of perception that confirmed the truth of the past which it made to come back, of the images it uncapped"[6]. And it has to be noted that repetition of "Venice" is not the repetition of Venice itself, but it is more like a "being reborn in me, when, trembling with joy, I heard the sound which was the same while tinkling a fork to a plate, and the same while striking a wheel with a hammer, when I felt the roughness of stones of the pavement, which was the same in the court of Germanti as in the baptistery of Saint Marc..."[7]. Marcel succeeds while Contantin Constantius does not, not only because, unlike Marcel, he conducts an "experiment". Constantin Constantius searches for repetition as, one could say, a "total" experience of Berlin, that, using Kierkegaardian irony against Kierkegaard himself, we have already called as a search for repetition as an experience of *das ganze Berlin.* No matter how many there were of those, as Marcel Proust puts it, "instantaneous photographs of memory" (of Venice or Berlin), we believe that they would only be putative, and their "multitude" or "comprehensiveness" would never create either "Berlin" or "Venice", since they would never utter anything about an impression that could be only returned by an accident, which repeats, however, the reality itself, and not just "Venice itself".

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5 M. Proust: *Prarasto laiko beieškant. 7. Atrastas laikas.* Vertė Baužytė-Čepinskienė. Vilnius: Alma litera 1997, 147.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 142.

Thus, the response to the “experiment” is not a contingency (which, by the way, as an anticipation of “conditions of possibility”, is, most likely, only an instance of mediation, and cannot pretend to be repetition), but reality as singular experienciality, which is opposed to intelligible (recollected) and, for that matter, universal “reality”.

The reality, however, is experienced as transformation of time: Proust, the one who searches for lost time and finds it, conveys exactly the same idea as the one perceived by Kierkegaard in his discussions on religious existence, i. e. the interruption of the time of eternity into our experience, the living experience of *kairós* as reality.

The “success” of *repetition* depends exactly on the fact that it is impossible to conduct an “experiment” with it, i. e. *it is impossible* to anticipate the conditions of its possibility; on the other hand, that “success” is not a new repetition of the totality of former everyday-life experience, but is *the same* authentic experience. In this case *the same* stands for that very first primordial authenticity, which, as *repetition,* precedes any particular experience.

Kierkegaardian *repetition* as a certain structure of experience establishes a *difference* between reality (existence, Being) and thought. This thought of *difference* finds its realisation through the *difference* as temporality, i. e. through the difference between *kairós* and *chronos.*

According to Kierkegaard, a “miracle” of repetition can be performed if one breaks a closed circle of experience and reflection, where those two moments, existence and thought, emerge as the factors “eliminating” one another. At the same time, repetition is a “miracle” for one more reason: it recalls and gets back the “past” which precedes it by negation and elimination of the logic of thought. It is a singularly accessible epiphany which urges to surpass the temporal chronology. But what is the *past* for Kierkegaard in this case? It is obvious that it cannot be a certain customary modus of chronological time. Kierkegaardian discussion on repetition while questioning the novelty of it could help to provide an answer to this question. Does repetition embrace something new? Or, maybe on the contrary, repetition is the reiteration of what has already happened? Kierkegaard in the person of C. C. advises against being deceived by the idea that repetition could be something *new*[8]. Then, however, we need to ask another question: how does it happen that for Kierkegaard the non-existence of what is new, something what “has happened”, what is “old”, matches to the elimination of recollection from the structure of repetition? One should admit in this case that the past and the future as the modes of chronological time are, most likely, used here only to emphasise a certain paradoxical nature underlying the structure of repetition, discovered by thought. We are speaking, after all, about a super-temporal dimension that surpasses *chronos*, where it is possible to repeat not what has already happed and what is called the “past”, but what will happen; however, what is repeatable, due to its primordiality (and precedence) is not new, but, on the contrary, is “old”...

8 Kierkegaard, op. cit., 132.

Thus, we could presume that we are dealing with that modern and, in essence, Deleuzian structure of *repetition*, with that primordiality of repetition which eliminates all identities and questions all ontologies.

Despite of the fact that Kierkegaard represents the same nihilistic logic, i. e. the logic of *difference* based on negation as *différance*, the Kierkegaardian *repetition* in a nihilistic way expresses a different approach to reality (thinking of Being) than, say, philosophy of Deleuze. *Repetition, which comprises/involves* difference between reality and thought, between *kairós* and *chronos,* is "based" on or supposes the *real* negation and not some formal logical negation (Trendelenburg's lesson to Kierkegaard). Thus, Kierkegaard transforms the problematics of "real" negation into ontological theory of *difference.* Kierkegaardian *difference* in itself is an expression of nihilistic conflict between *reality* and thought, between *existence* and thought, the conflict, which is constant interminable negation of each other as different, of destruction of each other by difference. In that perspective, however, the most important "element" remains *reality/existence.*

The Kierkegaardian paradox, which can also be found in the structure of *repetition*, from the point of view of the nihilistic logic represents the concurrence between autoreferenciality and negation; from ontological point of view, it announces or expresses the loss of the *reality* in a nihilistic way.

Thus, from the point of view of relation to reality emerging from a certain interpretation of *difference,* this Kierkegaardian *repetition* can be seen as an explosion of the Paulinian passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians quoted by Agamben.

The most eminent continuation of such a *repetition,* which, on one hand, expresses the nihilistic logic of *difference,* and, on the other hand, by the very perspective of *difference* leads to the reality and Being, i. e. to the ontological dimension, is provided by the philosophy of Heidegger. The Heideggearian *Wiederholung,* based on a certain conception of temporality, is directed towards the authenticity of being. The authentic having-beenness is repetition, the movement backwards, back to the past, of our own life/or tradition, and the *recovery* of possibilities of our own ability to be. In the case of the non-authentic being, someone's thrownness and his own ability-to-be is "forgotten" due to concerns of the present. The past objects and events remain the foundation of this fundamental forgetfulness as long as they serve the concerns of the present. Not everyone is able to "keep" them, i. e. to "forget" them in a certain way. And the recollection itself is possible only through certain forgetfulness, through that fundamental "oblivion" which is in contrast to repetition, but not to so-called retention. Thus, repetition comprises, involves certain temporality: the fundamental forgetfulness makes the past to be more the past than the present; it is precisely *Dasein,* which has forgotten about itself and has lost itself in the superficiality of its own concerns that can remember, i. e. to enter the realm made open

by that forgetfulness[9]. Thus, forgetfulness as a certain negative instance becomes here the most important approach to authenticity, i. e. reality. We will draw attention to the fact that in the philosophy of Heidegger the authentic being is discussed in the context of ontological distinction, the *Differenz,* between the Being and beings.

Moving to other cases of the explosion, *repetition,* of the Paulinian passage, and inquiring if Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault with their interpretations of the relationship between *repetition* and *difference* perform this explosion, let us think of an observation of Gianni Vattimo made some decades ago in his book *The adventures of the Difference:*

> "Jacques Derrida's 1968 Paris lecture on difference may at the time have looked like a straight manifesto of the philosophy of difference, but today it looks more like a kind of epitaph or memorial for it. Even at the time of its delivery this discourse was symptomatic and indicative of the decline of difference. (Is this too perhaps a peculiar destiny of difference, an 'effect of difference?') If we retrace the theoretical path followed by thinkers like Derrida and Deleuze, this decline looks inevitable. But my point is that this phenomenon is very far from signifying any decline in or exhaustion of the idea of ontological difference put forward by Heidegger; it is precisely in such adventures and in such a dissolution of 'the philosophy of difference' that ontological difference taps into its still-productive core, a core that constitutes an authentic future for thinking"[10].

As such reflection on Heideggerian *ontological difference* which managed to evade the *decline of difference,* and at the same time as the explosion of *repetition,* can be identified the philosophy of Agamben and his interpretation of Messianic time in his book *Il tempo che resta.*

Agamben's approach to *repetition,* from the point of view of the concepts of Being and time, is a certain continuation of Heideggerian *Wiederholung,* and, in the perspective of the represented time, it is mainly based on a distinction between an apostle and the figures of a prophet and an apocalypto.

The focus of the interest of the apostle is not the last day nor the moment when time will come to an end, but time which shrinks and starts to come to an end (*ho kairós synestalménos estín:* I Cor. 7,29), or time which remains between time and its end.

But how is it possible to recognise and imagine such time? And, lastly, how is it possible to "represent" it?

We would say that the most important moment, characteristic to Christian time, which was disclosed by Agamben and even represented using the spatial linear principle, is the non-concurrence of Messianic time neither with the end of times, nor with the *eon* of the future, nor with profane chronological time, and at the same its being non-extraneous to the latter. Messianic time, *ho nyn kairós,* in the Agambenian

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9 M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit,* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1979, 334–372.

10 G. Vattimo: *Le avventure della differenza*, Milano: Garzanti 2001, 151–152.

interpretation of Apostle Paul is "one part of profane time which is experienced as integrally transforming the recapitulation"[11].

Agamben, on one hand, tries to graphically imagine the "place" of messianic time on the "line of times", and, on the other hand, he tries to look for "theological", i. e. biblical "analogy" to the Paulinian conception of messianic time.

He compares the Messianic time to the circumcision of Apelle, and affirms that in both of these cases we face a certain caesura of time. Thus, the essential negative moment which allows Agamben to bring about the specificity of Messianic time, is the caesura of time, the non-continuation, "pause", "silence", which divides the division into two separate times: *i.e.* it includes in itself (the division) the "remainder", which exceeds, surpasses the very differentiation and which starts to represent the *difference* in time.

> "In this scheme, – as Agamben puts it, – the Messianic time emerges as that part of the profane eon which constantly surpasses *chronos,* and the part of eternity which transcends the eon of the future. They both [emerge] as the remainder of the two-eon division"[12].

Yet, to say truth, any attempt to schematise and represent Messianic time in this way is doomed to failure: since any attempt to re-present or "express" destroys that very *ho nyn kairós.* It's not without reason that Agamben tries to show that *kairós* appears as a caesura, as a fracture in the time (and in any representation as well). As a consequence, we could say that Agamben talks about *ho nyn kairós* as *difference* and pure ineffability. From this point of view, one can compare Agamben to Walter Benjamin and his ideas on caesura as the contents of a piece of art and its truth as a concurrence of caesura and ineffability[13].

For Agamben, however, this caesura of the time is intelligible. Thus, it might appear that it is possible to think *via* the thought free from any spatial representations. The point of confusion between *eschaton* and Messianic time consists in the fact that the first one is representable, but, as Agamben believes, is unintelligible. Meanwhile the real experience of time meets with (spatially) un-representable, but intelligible time. Any attempt to represent Messianic time fails to discern the essential, *i.e.* time that remains, the "remainder", "rest" of time that provides evidence that time has started to come to an end.

Agamben introduces the definition of "operative time" of Guillaume as a perspective of his own research, and quotes this author:

> "'Operative time' is time which the mind (*mente*) uses/takes on (*impiega*) in order to produce the image-time (*immagine-tempo*)"[14].

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11 Agamben, op. cit., 64.
12 Ibid., 65.
13 W. Benjamin: *Selected Writings.* Vol. I (1913–1926), eds. M. Bullock, M.W. Jennings. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harward University Press 1999, 341.
14 Agamben, op. cit., 65.

As one can see, one of the most important concepts in this definition is the expression “image-time”, which provides an alternative to representation in two-dimensional space. Yet if in this case too we have to deal with representation again, then how this new concept of time, the one of “operative time” can turn to the rejection of representation as representation? That is, is it possible to have a non-representative representation or image?

According to Agamben, Guillaume introduces a complication into chronological representation/imagining of time, while projecting the very process of formation of image-time into the latter[15]. The result of this complicating projection is a new representation of time, which is no longer linear, but three-dimensional. This representation corresponds to the so-called chronogenetic time.

Agamben projects this Guillaumian philosophical-linguistic approach to language and time, which enables the insight of “operative time”, into Paulinian conception of time seeking to unveil the Messianic meaning of time. He notes that our every representation of time, every discourse on time implies further, ulterior time (*il tempo ulteriore*), which is impossible to exhaust nor by that time representation, nor by that discourse.

By “ulterior” he means a description of vertical perspective, not of horizontal one. Ulterior time, *i.e. time* “acting” in the vertical perspective, is not “complimentary” to chronological time, which might appear as “added” or “connected” to chronological time; it is interior time, time in time. As it concerns *ulterior* time (*il tempo ulteriore*), Agamben maintains it to be *non ulteriore, ma interiore.*

Thus, we would say, *ulterior time* is not *subsequent* (*exterior*) *time, but interior time.* Only such interpretation of Agamben can help us also to understand his explanation of “backlog” from time, the fact of its being “remainder”, “rest” of time, being the “rest” in the state of non-concurrence with time that is represented, expressed by representations, or “put into image”. Yet Agamben derives our possibility to “achieve”, “complete” or “catch” time precisely from this. The definition of Messianic time proposed by Agamben is based on the structure of Messianic time as *ulterior time.*

Meantime, to Agamben, Messianic time is, to put in Heideggerian terms, the only authentic time; and we are time. In consequence, it is the only *real* time.

But why the Agambenian interpretation of Paulinian concept of time as Messianic time while trying to enforce the distinction *chronos/kairós*, does not find it enough to apply the Benveniste’s linguistic merits to the philosophy, i. e. to use the enunciation as performative utterance, and tends to the Guillaumian linguistic theory which is prior to Benveniste?

Besides the insight of Benveniste of the performative aspect of enunciation, what is very important to Agamben in that performative character of enunciation, it is the insight of operative time, a subsequent fracture of coherence, and a lag of enunciation in the “pure presence”.

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15 Agamben, op. cit., 65.

It might seem that the latter linguistic insight is decisive while trying to uncover the structure of operative time in Messianic time. It turns to be even more imperious if we remember that *kairós* emerges as caesura, as a fracture in chronological time. In consequence, it might appear that if one discerns in the structure of *enunciation* as performative act not only a concurrence of *dictum* and *factum,* but also a fracture of coherence and a lag of enunciation in the "pure presence", then, at least in a formal way, one can also recognise the structural relationship between *kairós* and *chronos.*

We believe that the search for the structure of *repetition* in the Agambenian concept of Messianic time is framed by two important concepts: *Unforgetfulness* (*l'indimenticabile*) and *Recapitulation* (*Ricapitolazione*).

The theme of *Unforgetfulness* comes to Agamben's horizon not only through Kierkegaard but also through Walter Benjamin.

> "I think that Benjamin had in mind something of the same kind, when he talked about the life of an idiot, about the requirement to remain unforgotten"[16].

As Agamben puts it, one speaks here not about a simple requirement to remember, to bring back to memory what has been forgotten. Agamben affirms:

> "This requirement is related not to the fact of being remembered, but with the fact of remaining unforgotten".

At the same time he draws a very clear distinction between remembrance and unforgetfulness. What Agamben is really talking about, it is not the requirement of remembrance, but an "idiotic" (in Benjamin's sense) requirement to preserve in us and with us, as unforgetfulness, what has been lost. The only sense of unforgetfulness is the fact that what has been lost, does not require any constant remembrance, but has to be preserved with us and in us as what has been forgotten or lost. Thus, Agamben tends not to the remembrance as repetition of *the same*, but to the negative "experience" of difference, to the repetition which becomes negatively possible through the preservation of what has been lost. For Agamben thus, the unforgetfulness is "alive" through that experience of negativity.

What is the most important of all, however, is the fact that, to Agamben's view, there is no alternative between forgetfulness and remembrance. First of all, he understands this opposition only as an opposition between unconsciousness and consciousness. Meanwhile, "only the capacity to remain loyal to what has to remain unforgotten, even if it has been forgotten, is determinant, and it seeks to remain with us somehow, to be for us in some possible way."[17] And this way unveils itself to Agamben as the primordial negativity.

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16 Agamben, op. cit., 43.
17 Ibid., 44.

Messianicity coincides with the place of the fulfilment/accomplishment of the requirement of unforgetfulness *par excellence.* It is possible to relate Messianicity to the requirement of unforgetfulness for that reason that it is not an attitude according to which one should look at the world as if the redemption has been completed.

> "The coming of the Messiah, – writes Agamben, – means that all things along with their seeing subject are taken 'not as if/probably not', one evokes them and revokes with the same gesture. There is no more any seeing subject left, who at some moment would be able to make a decision to act *as if* in a positive way. The Messianic evocation, first of all, dislocates and eliminates the subject: such is probably the meaning of Gal. 2, 20: 'I live; yet not I [*zō oukēti ego*], but Christ/Mesiah liveth in me'"[18].

In the Agambenian interpretation, however, that corporeal "loss of the self" relates to unforgetfulness: only the one who remains loyal to what he loses, is unable to believe in any worldly identity or *klēsis.*

Thus, Agamben's *requirement* (*esigenza*) and his formula "*not as if*" *is an* expression of the *other logic,* which, as we will see, is his justification of Messianicity as the structure of *repetition*. Agamben makes a reference to *De non aliud* of N. Cusanus, where the opposition A/not-A supposes the third possibility, an opposition that has the form of double negation: not not-A. Agamben considers that this logical paradigm is based on a Paulinian passage, on his Epistle to the Corinthians I Cor 9, 20–23, where he defines his position concerning the partition/differentiation of the Jews:

> "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might Gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some".

Thus, the one who has the Messianic law is not-without law/not-not under the law.

This *other logic* of Cusanus which supposes the "third possibility" is very important to Agamben in his attempt to justify his position. Agamben uses it to justify his "differentiation of differentiation or his logic of *difference.* We mentioned this in our discussion about the place of *kairós* in the profane *chronos*. We can apply now the same *other logic* for the Messianic experience as the one that reveals itself through the opposition between remembrance and forgetfulness. The fact that there is no alternative between those two elements of opposition supposes the "third possibility":

If remembrance is A, and non remembrance is not-A,

[18] Agamben, op. cit., 44.

then while we speak about *unforgetfulness,* we also speak about *non-non-rememberence* (not not-A) or *repetition.* Thus, the "partition of the partition" or the *other* logic, the logic of difference, and not the dialectical logic, is what makes the repetition structurally possible. This is how Agamben reasserts the Aristotelian logic by renewing it in a paradoxical way, i. e. by nihilistically introducing "the possibility of third" as *difference*.

However, the time of Messiah as the structure of *repetition,* would remain formal enough if we would discuss it only in the perspective of "possible third" as remembrance or non-remembrance or simply unforgetfulness. The time of Messiah is articulated by Agamben by introducing of one more important concept, that of *recapitulation* (*Ricapitolazione*). We believe that it would be helpful to understand its meaning in order to provide some contents to that formal *other logic.* In his discussion concerning this concept, Agamben notices that Apostle Paul, while speaking about the time of Messiah, does not use the noun *anakephalaíōsis*, but uses the corresponding verb *anakephalaióomai,* which could be translated as "to repeat in a short way", "to repeat summarizing" "to recapitulate", "to provide a brief reminder".

Thus, he makes an attempt to disclose in time the structure of what he calls *ricapitolazione* and original Greek form of which would be *anakephalaíōsis/anakephalaióomai.*

> "Thus, Messianic time is total repetition of the past, even in the meaning which it gets in the legal term 'total sentence'"[19].

Speaking of the "total repetition of the past" it is important not to slide to the representations produced by the chronological time and expressed through the linear structure. The *recapitulation* is not just any "reproduction" of the past achieved through recollection of any past experience. What we have in mind, after all, is not time as *chronos,* but the relationship between *chronos* and *kairós.* Even if the so-called "recapitulation" is really related to *chronos*, it is only its relation to *kairós that* makes it possible to "recapitulate", to offer its "total" version.

As Agamben puts it, "repetition is nothing else as the other side of the typological relation between the present and the past, which is established by the Messianic *kairós*."[20]

He writes here, however, not only about an archetype, but about a certain constellation or even unity of *kairós* and *chronos,* where the "entire" past as total is contained, concentrated, i. e. repeated in the present. When Agamben speaks about "remaining time" ("*il tempo che resta*"), such in the only way to realise his claim to the "remainder", the "rest" (*resto*); the "remainder" coincides with "everything" here. This is why that Agamben's Messianic time does not favour the future, but establishes an extraordinary relationship between the past and the future in the perspective of discovery of *kairós* in *chronos.* According to Agamben,

19 Agamben, op. cit., 75.
20 Ibid., 76.

the total repetition for Apostle Paul means that *ho nyn kairós* is the recapitulation of the past and the future, when at the fateful moment we stand before the past, or the past is before us, and we have to adjust and define our relations with it. It would not be possible to assume, however, that this is the case of an attempt to settle accounts with the past, since in such a case we would consider the past as entirely accomplished. Yet our obligation to the past is imperative, thus, the "total repetition", to put in legal terms, is the "total sentence" of the past.

In order to justify that attitude of recapitulation of the past and the future, Agamben quotes a passage the Paulinian Epistle to the Philipians (Fil. 3, 13):

> "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before [*epekteinómenos*]."[21]

It is not without reason that Agamben in his text does not translate the Greek *epekteinómenos.* Yet he does not discuss the meaning of the Greek term, but he focuses on prefixes. Meanwhile, we will draw attention to the fact that in Greek language *epéktasis* means expansion, prolongation*; epekteinó* – to expand, to prolong, to pull forward. The derivative *epekteínomai*, however, is only used in that passage (Fil. 3, 13) and it literally means a pointed and intensive act of expansion, i. e. *the act of* pulling forward of the faithful. Agamben points out to the fact that this term verb has two prefixes: *epi-* which means "being on", "on the top of something" or "close to something"; "an excess of something", "addition", "moving after something"; "around"; and prefix *ek-,* which means "from". The presence of these two different prefixes in this word and their combination with the verb meaning "to be expanded" refers, as Agamben sees it, to the duplicity of Paulinian motion. With this interpretation of Paulinian gesture as double motion, Agamben shows how the Messianic *kairós* establishes a relationship between the present and the past. And this relationship is *repetition*. The interpretation of Messianic time, provided in the chapter *Ricapitolazione* of Agamben's book, could be considered as one more fragment of the explosion of the Paulinian passage. It not only discloses and accomplishes in a very particular way that Agambenian conception of *repetition,* but it is also purposefully asserts the nihilistic perspective of *difference* formally defined by the "other logic" of the *unforgetfulness*.

This nihilistic vision of time and repetition also provides a broad context for theoretical discussions of Richard Kearney's anatheistic conception of the narrative imagination as the condition of the accomplishment of repetition.

At the same time, this interpretation of *repetition* from ontological, *authentic* perspective provides a possibility to problematically raise a question concerning the "unity" of the thought which represents the nihilistic logic of difference: is it possible to consider that philosophies of

[21] Agamben, op. cit., 44.

Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, etc. are the cases of explosion of *repetition?* Or do they only show the twilight of the thinking of difference, are they just a naked confirmation of the "effect of difference"?

EXISTENTIAL PRACTICE: RELATING TO THE INFINITE

Anne Louise Nielsen[1]

Abstract

The present article discusses "the positive" in Kierkegaard's thinking in order to sketch out an existential practice in relating to the infinite. Kierkegaard's thinking is mainly tied to currents as "the negative" and "negativity", especially caused by his continual reference to Socrates and his overall inspiration from Hegelian dialectics. This article poses questions as: What exactly do we mean by using the operators "the positive" and "the negative"? Does Hegelian and Kierkegaardian negativity mean the same? To what extent is it legitimate to state "a positivity" in Kierkegaard's thinking? How does this positivity relate to the single individual? How can we interpret the category of "sin"? What does Johannes Climacus bear in mind differentiating a "Religiousness A" from a "Religiousness B"? Given that Climacus knows the art of dialectics to be an indispensable part of our conceptions and act of thinking, how does he pose an alternative way of thinking of dialectics than pure reflection? How does Climacus more precisely sketch an existential practice in relating to the infinite, e. g. what does he understand by the expression "to practice the absolute relation to the absolute τέλος"? What is the relationship between an existential practice and the comical? What is Climacus' point of ranging some life stages? What is "the comic paradigm" in modern research? Given that the modern idea of the infinite is tied to comedy, the question is what existential possibilities are implied? Does Climacus agree with modern research? Texts from Kierkegaard, Hegel and Alenka Zupančič provide the basis for this discussion.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, existential practice, positivity, dialectics, incarnation, the comical, freedom.

"Omnis affirmatio est negatio"[2]. In the *Concept of Anxiety*, Virgilius Hafniensis hints in a footnote to Spinoza's famous formula for the act of defining: every affirmation is a negation. Hafniensis notices that affirmation *precedes* negation, like a person always begins with something positive, e. g. he begins by admiring a person. But as soon as he begins to reflect, it triggers a dialectical process, in which the positive only precedes the negative, as admiration pre-

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2 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. by R. Thomte and A.B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 146.

cedes jealousy, pride precedes cowardice etc. Above all "the new philosophy" [Hegel] have got it all wrong by setting the negative *before* the positive.

This article is mainly concerned with "the positive" in Kierkegaard's thinking in order to sketch out what I would like to call an "existential practice" regarding the act of *relating to the infinite*. The primary work referred to will be Johannes Climacus' *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846).

The article consists of six parts. After sorting out the scientific levels concerning the linguistic operators "the negative" and "the positive" in the first part, in the second part I display two concepts of positivity, found in *The Concept of Irony* (1841). Further I argue for a link between positivity and subjectivity/inwardness regarding the single individual. The third part presents an outline and discussion of Climacus' differentiation of "Religiousness A" from "Religiousness B", formally connected to respectively a Greek and a Christian paradigm. In my opinion this differentiation explores the positive and the negative at a new level, and it sketches two existential practices, namely that of holding a dialectical-ironical attitude toward the world, referring to A, and that of holding a dialectical-comical attitude, referring to B. Part four exposes Climacus' definition of the comical, in relation to the famous stage hierarchy of personalities and points to an existential practice, connected to "an expanded eye for the comical". Part five discusses this existential practice by holding it against a modern perspective on the comical, namely the Slovenian scholar Alenka Zupančič. I argue that Climacus by relating to a positivity/prime confirmation avoids ending up in a modern tendency of drawing empty caricatures in the name of taking "a critical approach". Finally part six will offer some concluding remarks.

To sort out the levels

In his reference to the Spinozistic quotation, Hafniensis speaks at an existential level despite of using the logical operators "the positive" and "the negative". To get closer to the idea of an existential practice of relating to the infinite, I will sort out some levels where it makes sense to use these operators:

At an *epistemological level*, it is clear that it is not possible only to negate since you always negate *something*. In this sense, it keeps up with Spinoza. However, negation is not *negativity*; a scholarly movement cogently set forward by the German philosopher, Michael Theunissen to characterise a certain philosophical method. "Negativity" seems to say something about the mutual relationship between the positive and the negative; it states their very difference towards each other. Theunissen made important and standing contributions concerning Kierkegaard's method of negativity[3] which one has to consider carefully before pointing to the positive in Kierkegaard's thinking.

[3] M. Theunissen: *Das Selbst auf dem Grund der Verzweiflung*, Frankfurt am Main: Hain 1991.

At a *life practical level*, we could state negativity as an experience of pain, anxiety, suffering etc., that is, everything that has failed and run at a background of the idea of a life that came out well. At an *epistemological level*, negativity states the limits for knowing and understanding the positive. At an *ontological level*, negativity functions as reference to the origin of Being, as well as to its future, that is, it determines the transition from Being to Non-Being and vice versa as a process determined by reason and reality, taking place *in time*, as we find it in Hegel's thinking.

The Kierkegaardian negativity process, in which he describes life practical phenomena as anxiety, despair, sorrow etc., appears almost as a Hegelian reality process running in time. The only difference seems to be that Kierkegaard is a better psychologist than Hegel as he offers extremely differentiated descriptions of the complex existential dialectics. Contrary to this simplification, I argue for a fully other type of dialectics in Kierkegaard's thinking – a type of dialectics connected to an existential practice tied to Religiousness B. *If* and only *if* it is possible to slip out of the exhausting dialectical immersion, it must be by having the dialectical in second place[4], as Climacus puts it in *The Postscript.*

Two concepts of "positivity"

In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard ascribes to the sophists positivity and to Socrates negativity, emphasizing it to be a simplification. Sophistic positivity finds a good example in Protagoras who positively states that virtue *can* be taught and so holds a great confidence to existence and knowledge[5]. Contrary to this, Socrates "knows nothing", and in this way he negates. But Socrates does not negate *everything*, since he exactly states something breaking new in history, namely subjectivity. According to Kierkegaard, Greece urgently needed liberation from this sophistic positivity, and this could only happen through a radical cure, namely Socrates. However, the liberation battle has not come to its end. Socrates represents an *abstract form* of subjectivity, Kierkegaard states, since he is in lack of the "objectivity in which subjectivity in its intrinsic freedom is free"[6].

Despite of sounding almost Hegelian in pointing to a lack of objectivity, Kierkegaard first and foremost thinks in a structure of incarnation, which is also a structure of paradox. Climacus words it "the God in time"[7]. This incarnated factum *is* the affirmative objectivity that sets the

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4 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, 556.

5 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Irony With Continual Reference to Socrates*, ed. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989, 208.

6 Ibid., 211.

7 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, 583.

freedom of the subject's freedom, functioning in Kierkegaard's words as an "enlarging boundary of subjectivity"[8].

In opposition to this, subjectivity and irony *own* Socrates; he is caught up in a reflective snare, pulling the loop infinite backwards with his irony. The Greek positivity, however, rises again in a Hegelian disguise, since in the Hegelian thinking the negative only precedes the positive (remembering Hafniensis' rebuke in the footnote). That is why Socrates keeps on playing a very important role in many of the Kierkegaardian works, namely as the one who guards the boundary lines for what can be predicated and what can not. This new conception of positivity, rooted in the incarnated factum, ties as well to a new concept of subjectivity/inwardness regarding the single subject. Hafniensis opens *The Concept of anxiety* not only pointing to the odd phenomena anxiety but also by pointing to the even more odd phenomenon *sin* – a phenomenon man, in all kinds of sciences, is unable to get a hold on. Sin as a "border conception" is in short what is left of man's identity in the Christian paradigm. Christ negates all human systems and concepts, including the identity of every individual. Opposite Socrates, who keeps on groping for his identity, as he questions himself whether he is a more curious monster or by nature sharing something divine[9], the Christian sinner cannot even pose this question. All marks of identity have been erased. We may recognize this feeling that the existential curtain is suddenly pulled away, leaving us momentarily without reality. But to Hafniensis, as well as to Climacus, this feeling is not temporarily but definitive. Nevertheless it opens up a new orientation, a new sense perception, a new sort of inwardness that escapes the dialectics situated within immanence. The ironical laughter stops for a moment. It is, however, important to accentuate that we can never escape dialectics in our expositions and conceptions. But the point is that Climacus introduces a dialectics situated within transcendence, and inside this rests a new positivity as well as a new existential practice. I will now qualify this more precisely by fleshing out Religiousness A and B.

"Religiousness A" and "Religiousness B"

In *The Postscripts*, Climacus imparts us with the following definitions of Religiousness A:

> "Religiousness A is the dialectic of inward deepening; it is the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned by a something but is the dialectical inward deepening of the relation, consequently conditioned only by the inward deepening, which is dialectical."[10]

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8 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, op. cit., 211.

9 This takes place in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*, S. Kierkegaard: *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985, 37.

10 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 556.

In my opinion, Religiousness A corresponds to Socrates, to immanence, to negativity, to irony; whereas Religiousness B corresponds to the Christian Paradigm, to transcendence, to confirmation, to the comical. In Religiousness A, the individual is, in referring to his inward deepening, "dialectical in self-annihilation". This indicates the art of suffering, in which man holds himself in a constant relationship to the great infinite by making himself small and insignificant. Actually not so far from the Hegelian dialectical process of resolving contrasts into a synthesis, since is the same strong need of totalizing. At an existential level, it may grasp the meaning of not only the need for totalizing, but also a closely related need of immersing ourselves in our own deep reflection – ambivalently for the very sake of relating. In this way, we place all dialectics *inside* ourselves. Religiousness B, however, suggests a different existential practice. It suggests depositing the dialectics *outside* ourselves, referring back to Climacus' wording of having the dialectical "in second place". This indeterminate wording is shortly after "specified" as a "definite something"[11], provocatively pointing to a third human need, namely that of constantly classifying and determining. In Religiousness B, we must exactly relate to the fact that concerning our "eternal happiness" we are left powerless, only to put our trust in an undefined "definite something" – a paradoxical formulation, pointing to a task which requires an extremely great and continuous amount of passion. Now we have reached the very core of the existential practice:

> "If the individual is paradoxical-dialectical, every remnant of original immanence annihilated, and all connection cut away, and the individual situated at the edge of existence, then we have the *paradoxical-religious*. This paradoxical inwardness is the greatest possible, because even the most dialectical qualification, if it is still within immanence, has, as it were, a possibility of an escape, of a shifting away, of a withdrawal into the eternal behind it; it is as if everything were not actually at stake. But the break makes the inwardness the greatest possible."[12]

In the following, I will try to sort these complex expressions out. As we notice, this individual is "paradox-dialectical", and he balances the difficult life task being "situated at the edge of existence", constantly having the feeling that "all connection is cut away" and "everything is at stake". That is, he is able to keep together contrasts, namely on the one hand the longing and creation of a coherent life and on the other, the fact that existence is always indeterminable open. Post the coming of Christ, the individual has eternally lost his identity, referring back to Hafniensis' conception of sin. This is analogous to what Climacus refers to as "the break that makes the inwardness greatest possible". An answer to this frustrating lack of existential orientation, Climacus explains, is not to enter the monastery. The task is more precisely to practice "the absolute distinction" (what I have also called the task of relating to the infinite)

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11 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 556.

12 Ibid., 572

which does not necessarily mean that the individual becomes indifferent to the finite[13]. Climacus words the task in a short formula:

> "The task is to practice the absolute relation to the absolute τέλος in such a way that the individual strives to reach this maximum: to relate himself *simultaneously* to his absolute τέλος and to the relative–not by mediating them but by relating himself absolutely to his absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative."[14]

In this way, the paradoxical-dialectical individual masters the almost schizophrenic task of relating simultaneously to the absolute and to the relative being two different things. This guards the individual against the three mentioned negative needs, namely the dangerous need for totalizing, the destroying need for never ending reflection and the immediate need for categorizing. In my perspective, it is evident that we have a very hard time accepting not only everything that conditions us (cf. Religiousness A and B both make strong conditions) but in particular we question a condition that "has the dialectical in second place". For how can we settle for (just) the real, namely being in a radical open position and not immediately taking control of the place of the dialectical process? Climacus seeks to remind us that we always live in a "dialectical moment" and that we should not try to limit the scope of the dialectical by placing it according to our very fixed conceptions of time and place. In this way the dialectical exists only in second place and the individual who relates to this fact lives with an open attitude towards the world, willing to trust unknown events that can, however, end up having a crucial impact on his life. Like this the conceptions of time and place are constantly displaced.

This thinking roots, as mentioned, in the structure of incarnation, interestingly referring back to the etymology: in-carnatio (embodied in flesh), that is God himself incarnated in the fragile at a certain time and place. In this way God proved the whole point of relating to an indefinite "definite something", namely in the meaning of taking a chance right here and right now by relying in something fragile and open, something beyond categories and yet something *definite*, something *concrete*. This is also what happens in love and faith when we cannot help ourselves reaching out for this definite something, willingly being conditioned. We can take this "definite something" as the art of affirmative objectivity, limiting the subject, that Climacus called for in his pointing out negatively Socrates' unlimited subjectivity. Like this the positive precedes the negative. The meaning of the incarnation is nothing else but this fact: It really did happen! I really was limited. Impossible to explain in details afterwards but necessary to keep on relating to. Hereby the negative dialectical spiral has been stopped.

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13 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 407.
14 Ibid.

Existential practice tied to "an expanded eye for the comical"

As already mentioned, we can overall tie Religiousness A with a practice of irony and Religiousness B with a practice of the comical. I will qualify this perspective by exploring Climacus' conception of the comical. His definition is this:

> "The matter is very simple. The comic is present in every stage of life (except that position is different), because where there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comic is present. The tragic and the comic are the same inasmuch as both are contradiction, but the tragic is suffering contradiction, and the comic is painless contradiction."[15]

Now, Climacus states that "the comical" is present wherever there is life, that is, wherever human beings are. Eventually, he ties the comical to an anthropological description by asking whether the individual has the comical/the contradiction inside or outside himself. Accordingly, he outlines a hierarchy consisting of different personalities or "life stages" (primarily the aesthete – the ethicist – the religious) with the comical as the organizing principle: The aesthete has the contradiction outside himself since the only thing that holds him back from the party comes from the outside.

The ethicist has the comical within himself since he must put up a safeguard between protecting e.g. animal rights for bats and the hatred to bats from the rest of the world.

Finally, we reach a boundary. The religious individual as hidden inwardness is inaccessible to the comical interpretation. He cannot hold the comical outside himself because it is *hidden* inwardness and does not contradict with anything. Furthermore, the religious has brought into consciousness the inner contradiction dominating the preceding stage and "has it with himself" as something lower. Like this, Climacus concludes that the religious individual is "protected by the comic against the comic"[16]. Another wording is that the comic has become *auxiliary*, that is, it no longer controls the individual, and he can relate to the infinite and express himself in passion without constantly redrawing himself in humour. This does of course not imply that the religious has no sense of humour; on the contrary the religious has the most expanded eye for the comical since he makes the top stage.

The structuring principle for the stage hierarchy is that the lower never makes the higher comical. As Climacus exemplifies:

> "Thus a horse can be the occasion for a man to look ludicrous, but the horse does not have the power to make him ludicrous"[17].

In the same way, a humorist (the stage below the religious) can be the occasion for a religious to look ludicrous, but the humorist's joke does not have the power to make the religious ludicrous. Accordingly, I argue

15 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 513.
16 Ibid., 522.
17 Ibid., 520.

the same point as I did by exposing the dialectics of Religiousness B: The comical/the contradiction has become auxiliary in the religious sphere, because it has been placed *outside* the individual. He cannot immerse himself in any immanent structure, including that of the comical, since he must *live* the contradiction. In this way the contradiction is nothing else but the individual's own humble existence contrasted against the absolute. There is an analogy with the aesthetic sphere in which the contradiction also comes from outside; the only difference is the *conscious* contradictory living in the religious sphere.

This idea has a general implication for theological conceptions such as repentance, faith, sin, etc., referring back to phenomena which are dialectically and individually *lived* since there exist no higher perspective from where they can be ranked lower (only God can forgive sins). Climacus offers an illustrative example as he points out that a low and dissolving ranking of repentance, e.g. like the system of indulgence in The Middle Ages, would be to flee into the aesthetical sphere whereas repentance belongs to the religious sphere[18].

"The comic paradigm" and its limitations

During the past few years there has been a focus on the comical and comedy, even expounded as the "comic paradigm", lead by Alenka Zupančič among others. Inspired by Hegel and the Christian writer, Nathan A. Scott, Zupančič understands comedy as "incarnation" (in a structural way) due to the fact that comedy is not the material undermining of the infinite[19] but the infinite's undermining of itself. That is, Christ is not a religious genius but Christ *is* the God, who slipped on his head. Now, what could be a possible limitation in such a conception? I argue that Zupančič's anthropology beforehand determines her perspective on the comical which reacts back on her anthropology in a reductive way.

Zupančič understands man as a "failed finitude", filled with passion and constantly exceeding himself. This endless striving/contradiction is summed up in the comic paradigm. Zupančič states:

> "And then there is also a possible *'objectification'* (or singularization) of the (endless) internal contradiction, which one could relate, among other things, to comedy and to the 'comic paradigm.'"[20]

This statement shows that to Zupančič the comical *is* the very objectification of contradictions. Or put in other words, the good joke sets us free. In my opinion Zupančič not only lessens Hegel's very dynamic conception of spirit, she also lessens the entire room for transcendence and the existential possibilities of man. In Hegel's thinking incarnation and comedy does not share the same structure, since comedy is an art

18 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 524.
19 The infinite is understood in an immanent (Hegelian) way.
20 A. Zupančič: *The Odd One In On Comedy*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2008, 55 *(my italicization)*.

form of representation whereas incarnation belongs to a higher form of spirit, carrying self consciousness *in itself* so as to appear in faith as a real person[21]. Zupančič on the other hand puts her trust in the comedy but her idea of infinity is purely functional, namely that of showing man his own failures. His existential practice is reduced to that of seeing through all contradictions in order in a hollow laughter to enjoy himself being objectified.

The striking thing, however, is that the anthropology of Climacus and Zupančič are much alike, since Climacus also ascribes to man something contradictory as shown in my outline of the stage hierarchy. But the crucial difference is the dynamic in the stage hierarchy which constantly enables a *new* individual position, naturally continuously based on a contradiction (this is the negativity that we will never escape). For example, the humorist laughs at other jokes than the aesthete, in the same way as we can change our perspective and suddenly find ourselves laughing of things we certainly did not laugh at five years ago. This dynamic which we can understand is analogous with that of living in a "dialectical moment" makes room for the individual to change radically, to be suddenly limited in a new affirmative way.

I will state the central difference between Climacus and Zupančič like this: Zupančič's anthropology determines "her picture of God", reacting back on her anthropology in a limiting way, whereas Climacus' "picture of God" inspires his anthropology in a dynamic way. In this way, for Climacus it all does not end up in a good joke but there exists a hope for the individual to break out of the dialectics situated within immanence and express pathos. "The God in time", Climacus' picture of God, holds together the infinite and the finite *in time* and by mirroring ourselves in this paradox that blows up all finite contrasts do we have a hope of getting out of the exhausting power of the comical.

Concluding remarks

This article has tried to reflect on positivity in Kierkegaard's thinking in order to sketch an "existential practice" in relating to the infinite. Kierkegaard is a trained dialectical thinker, wrapped in Socratic and Hegelian negativity. He is but aware that pure negativity at an existential level locks the individual up in a reflective cage and a hollow ironic laughter.

Whereas the sophistic positivity reappears in a Hegelian disguise, carrying great expectation to human existence and knowledge, Socrates puts himself at stake in pure negativity. To Kierkegaard, however, Socrates lacks an objectivity that paradoxically enlarges his subjectivity *by limiting it*. God's incarnation is stated as this affirmative objectivity, having its dialectics in second place that is, *outside* the individual instead of *inside*. The dialectics situated within transcendence sets the individual free of three destroying needs, namely that of totalizing, that of never-ending inner reflection and that of immediate categorizing. Ironi-

[21] G.W.F. Hegel: *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970, 541.

cally, self-annihilation and an illusory self-image of controlling the place of dialectics go hand in hand.

The new positivity ties to a new sort of inwardness in which the individual is deprived of his whole identity, expressed by Hafniensis as "sin". "Situated at the edge of existence" the individual, however, masters the difficult task of holding together contrasts and practising an absolute distinction by accepting that life is always radical open. The paradoxical-dialectical individual takes a chance in trusting a "definite something" and is hereby affirmatively limited, just like in love and faith. In my opinion we need to keep on practicing exactly this being affirmative limited.

Finally I have called attention to the link between an existential practice and an expanded eye for the comical. Inspired by Climacus' dynamic thinking in tying the comical, understood as a contradiction, to different individual positions which changes all life, I have argued against a modern tendency of letting comedy be our final salvation. In the stage hierarchy the comical has become auxiliary in the top stage since the religious expresses a hidden inwardness and rather *lives* as a contradiction. I take this to be analogous to the idea of having dialectics in second place, namely that the individual in this way relates to the infinite *outside* himself and is freed of all immanent originality. I find that Zupančič's conception of the infinite merely mirrors her anthropology in which man is a failed finitude, whereas Climacus' "God in time" manifests the greatest paradox and makes it possible for the individual to mirror this in a room of freedom.

BETWEEN ABSTRACTION AND THEOLOGY.
On the Heritage of Kierkegaard's Project of the Subjective Thinker in K. Jaspers and M. Heidegger

Jakub Marek[1,2]

Abstract

This paper addresses some of the characteristic concerns of Jaspers' and Heidegger's philosophical projects. The relation between the two thinkers is presented as a history of misunderstanding, yet also as a history of their respective interest in the *existentiell* aspect of philosophy. In analyzing Heidegger's and Jaspers' works, I present the ideas of "abstraction" and "theology" as the two extreme limits of the conceptual field within which their thinking evolves. After doing so, I make the suggestion that the *ethos* of their philosophy draws heavily from the heritage of Kierkegaard's project of the subjective thinker.

Keywords: Existentialism, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, subjectivity, theology, prophetic philosophy.

In the 20^{th} century, the form of philosophizing which was associated with the notion of *existence* established itself and achieved major success. Whether as the philosophy of existence [*Philosophie der Existenz*] in Germany or, mainly in France, as existentialism, it came to be understood as a new direction in philosophy, as a restoration of the lively philosophical thought which is responsive to the individual and his or her needs. In my paper, I will present the philosophy of existence principally in this sense as it intensified a certain understanding of philosophy itself and exposed and stressed some of its aspects. In doing so, I am not singling the philosophy of existence out of the whole of philosophy, but rather trying to show that this is a new way of placing emphasis and asking the principal philosophical questions. In order to capture the special and most telling features of the philosophy of existence, I will employ two important notions – *abstraction* and *theology*. It is the task of this interpretation to follow the attempts of the philosophy of existence to deal with the extreme position of abstraction as its unwanted possibility – running the

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2 This publication was supported by the The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – Institutional Support for Longterm Development of Research Organizations - Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (Charles Univ, Fac Human 2013).

risk that this philosophy becomes merely a "theory of existence" – and how it stresses the actuality of an individual's existence. This philosophy must also, on the other hand, delimitate itself or clarify its relation towards theology. As it is to be shown, this theological aspect is the second extreme possibility or (in Heidegger's words) *danger* of philosophy of existence.

This paper is being staged in the historical background of the Heidegger – Jaspers correspondence.[3] The case of the relationship of the two German thinkers will become our point of departure for following how the question of the meaning of philosophy became to be asked anew in this historical era and how it transformed into understanding philosophizing as the task of *existentiell* [*existentenziell*] *self-relation* of the thinker to himself. It surely will be interesting to trace this existentiell aspect back to Martin Heidegger, yet let it be stressed that I will not be elaborating primarily a *material* interpretation of Heidegger's or Jaspers' philosophy, but I will, by making use of their disputes and misunderstandings, try to point out to their *mutual* interest in a new formulation of philosophy as an *appeal*, as a task, which is placed on the philosopher or which he places on others – most of all on other philosophers.

I will devote the last *pasus* to S. Kierkegaard. By then it should become evident, on the grounds of the analysis of the discussed meanings, claims, appeals and understanding of philosophy, that this is a heritage of Kierkegaard's *project of the subjective thinker*.

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In February 1949, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) decided, for the second time since the end of the war, to write a letter of good-will to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). He did so regardless of the fact that the events of the Second World War and of the National-Socialist regime placed the two of them, as it were, on the opposite banks of the flow of history. The first of them, Jaspers, became the conscience of Germany and a moral authority.[4] The second lost his professorship and arrived in a state of mind he himself commented on: "I feel as if I were only growing in the roots, not in the branches anymore."[5] Yet there still remains something between the two of them, some essential connection. For this reason, Jaspers offers to Heidegger an invitation to resume their discussions. He was hoping to restore at least a faint glint of their former bright relationship which had, in the 1920s and early 1930s, meant so much for them and of which they were both nostalgically remembering. Heidegger will

3 N. B. that this paper was written before the publication of the so-called *Black Notebooks* [*Schwarze Hefte*], the last volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. The notebooks have not only initiated a new wave of anti-Heideggerian criticism, but they also provide additional material for this paper which the author unfortunately could not include.

4 Esp. in *The Question of German Guilt* (K. Jaspers: *Die Schuldfrage*, München: Piper 1996 [1946]).

5 M. Heidegger – K. Jaspers: *Briefwechsel*, München: Piper 1992, 174.

later mention these recollections in the last item of the Heidegger-Jaspers *Briefwechsel* – in his condolence telegram to Gertrude Jaspers.

"Enough of silence" writes Jaspers in the first attempted letter of March 1948 which, however, remained unsent. What he has in mind is Heidegger's silence about his role over the last 15 years, but he has also hopes that the two could have an honest conversation. The relationship of the two seems to be, as we can see in Jaspers' letter from February 1949, based in the *medium of philosophy*, and this even in spite of the "fundamental differences" of the two thinkers.[6] Jaspers disagrees with Heidegger vehemently, he refuses his philosophy mainly in regards to its *contents*; he characterizes it as if "in [Heidegger's philosophy] joined earnest nihilism with an initiation into magical arts [*Mystagogie eines Zauberer's*]."[7] Yet again, despite all this, Jaspers makes a hard effort to help Heidegger – he particularly wants to make sure that Heidegger can continue publishing his works. Interestingly, he adopts a very different stance to Heidegger's pedagogical role – this he rejects, because Heidegger's thinking is, according to Jaspers, "unfree, dictatorial, uncommunicative" and his influence as of a teacher might, in a situation where the German youth lacks any opinion of their own, be fatal.[8]

So what then is it that connects these two different thinkers? What is so essential that it makes Jaspers contact his Freiburg colleague and, possible friend, from many years ago? Is it their affiliation with the so-called philosophy of existence or existentialism which characterizes their relationship? Undoubtedly, in this regard their names used to appear often together in philosophical circles. When Jean Wahl (1888–1974), the popularizer of the new philosophy of existence in pre-war France, connected the two in mid-1930s, both Jaspers and Heidegger felt compelled to react to this inappropriate and unpleasant connection – and they both, independently, wrote a letter to Jean Wahl in order to remedy the situation.[9] We might find in their parallel attempts at strong delimitation from one another a fascinating mirror passing-by and simultaneously an important agreement in their fundamental views on the nature of philosophy.[10]

Jaspers, in his letter to Jean Wahl, repeats his thesis presented in the *Reason and Existenz* that he never claimed to have understood or dealt with the whole Being, but that he only spoke of the ways how is the *Encompassing* [*Weisen des Umgreifenden*]. The Encompassing is "not a horizon within which every determinate mode of Being and truth emerges for us, but rather that within which every particular horizon is enclosed as in something absolutely comprehensive which is no longer visible as a horizon at all. … It is the whole as the most extreme, self-supporting

6 M. Heidegger – K. Jaspers: *Briefwechsel*, München: Piper 1992, 170.
7 Ibid., 271.
8 Ibid., 272.
9 For a discussion of this Jaspers-Heidegger-Wahl affair see R. D. Cumming: *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, Vol. IV, Solitude, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001, 174.
10 Cf. *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 170.

ground of Being, whether it is Being in itself, or Being as it is for us".[11] Then Heidegger, in a parallel and independently conceived letter stresses that he, "does not care about the question of man's existence, but only for the question of the being in whole and as such." [12] His *Being and Time*[13] is a completely new and unique enterprise which has no predecessors in Kierkegaard (1813–1855) nor Nietzsche (1844–1900) and which Jaspers himself, according to Heidegger, fails to understand. There certainly is a passing-by, a misunderstanding between the two in that Jaspers demands a far more concrete notion of philosophy, which certainly lacks the Heideggerian level of *existential* [*existenzial*] or *ontological* analysis, but which is *de-facto* an attempt at an *existentiell*, *ontic* determination of philosophy. What is this determination? Jaspers rejects any "theory of existence". "Existentialism would be the death of the philosophy of existence."[14] What he has in mind is that any philosophy which would be just a mere disinterested analysis would fail to touch the essential problem – i.e. the individual human existence. True philosophy only takes place in the personal relation of the philosophizing individual to himself, in the awakening of the existence to an actual self-relation. Given that Heidegger does not care about the problem of the (individual) human existence, his philosophy is, from Jaspers' point of view, deficient. It is the individual, the existentiell, the ontic – only this *existence* which it all comes to. Jaspers cares about individual existence and that which belongs to it.

So perhaps it is the existentiell aspect of philosophy which is the *scandalon* of the Heidegger-Jaspers dispute about the nature of philosophizing. This is not the first time they both discuss this matter. For Jaspers, the idea is hardly new. As early as in his *Psychology of World-Views*,[15] the work which marks Jaspers' turn to philosophy, there he makes the distinction between the so-called "mere contemplation" [*bloße Betrachtung*] and the so-called "prophetic philosophy" [*prophetische Philosophie*][16]. Whereas Jaspers understands contemplation, in this case *psychology*, as a disinterested and "objectivizing" instrument of analyzing the whole of human mental life,[17] *philosophy* is, on the contrary, an interested prophecy, propagation and gospel of a certain world-view. A world-view is, according to Jaspers, no banal political conviction or a life-style handbook of "how-to's" but a complex whole, which provides the individual with moral leads and value scales, but which, most im-

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11 K. Jaspers: *Reason and Existenz*, transl. W. Earle, New York: Noonday Press 1955.

12 *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 277.

13 M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1967.

14 Ibid., 278.

15 I have discussed Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* in detail elsewhere (J. Marek: Existence a světový názor (Jaspers) [Existence and World-View (Jaspers)], in: L. Benyovszky: *Úvod do filosofického myšlení*, Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk 2007, 402–408).

16 K. Jaspers: *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, München: Piper 1985.

17 "Die Weltanschauungspsychologie ist ein Abschreiten der Grenzen unseres Seelenlebens, soweit es unserem Verstehen zugänglich ist" (ibid., 6).

portantly, provides what Jaspers calls the “grounds of comfort”, a firm foothold [*Halt*] and this foothold is a foundation and justification which makes it possible that a human existence does not despair and succumb to nihilism. The point being that Jaspers understands this prophetic philosophy as having the *actual existentiell role in the shaping of individual existence*: the prophetic philosophy gives meaning and goals to this existence, it transforms it, it conditions it and makes the individual its follower or disciple. Philosophy as an activity takes place in this self-relation when the individual, guided by the philosophy, changes the ways of his life and his existence as such. “Philosophizing is an act which works upon the inwardness of man,”[18] he put forward in a formulation 16 years later. The *ethos* of his understanding of what philosophy is remains the same. According to Jaspers, every true philosophy fulfills this role and provides grounds of comfort and existentiell leads for existence. To stress the point, the important aspect of the true, i.e. prophetic philosophy is its *affect* on the individual. And only in its affect is it what it is.

Jaspers spelled out this understanding of philosophy in 1919. To substantiate his claim he made references to the philosophical *prophecies* of Plato, Kant or Hegel. He continued to stress this *existentiell* aspect of philosophy in years to come and searched for the human grounds of comfort which would surpass the finite footholds, the footholds of everydayness, he searched for such footholds which would hold firm even in the crucial *limit situations* [*Grenzsituationen*] in which every previous foothold becomes questioned and challenged. Clearly, the search for the foothold must somehow transcend the banal everyday life, even finiteness as such and it has to be a “foothold in the infinite” [*Halt im Unendlichen*],[19] or, in other words, Jaspers will search for a foothold in *transcendence*, because “only in transcendence one can find rest.” [20] And philosophy as such is just this nostalgia, this home-sickness in search of rest, of a fundamental foothold. “I do not deny that in my philosophy there resounds a kind of nostalgia [Heimweh] for something lost, an echo of religion.”[21] Jaspers‘ existentiell notion of philosophy focuses in the ideal conception of a theological, i.e. authoritative, ultimate, fundamental positivity, in a *metaphysical decision of the human condition*, which would provide individual existence with the sought-for rest and comfort.

Now the question is if there was also any analogy of Jaspers’ confession of the meaning of philosophy in Heidegger. First of all, it was the *Psychology of World-Views* as such which caught Heidegger’s attention. In 1921, he publishes a voluminous paper called *Notes on Jaspers’ Psychology of World-Views*[22] where he reviews extensively this “compendium” of world-views and Jaspers’ manifesto of the existentially oriented

[18] Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, op. cit., 48.
[19] In the terminology of the *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen.*
[20] *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 277.
[21] Ibid., 278.
[22] M. Heidegger: Anmerkungen zu Karl Jaspers Psychologie der Weltanschauungen, in: M. Heidegger: *Wegmarken* (*Gesamtausgabe* 9), Frankfurt/M: V. Klostermann 1976, 1–44.

prophetic philosophy and he also formulates a very intense critique of Jaspers' *opus* and, most interestingly, he presents *a project of his own philosophizing*.

Initially, Heidegger appreciates highly Jaspers' methodical disinterestedness, his "mere contemplation". To Heidegger, this is a kind of variation of the phenomenological approach – primarily because Jaspers employs a "prejudice-less" method of investigation. The positive side of his approach is in that Jaspers avoids being a propagator of one of the investigated world-views. Yet Heidegger finds it problematic whether this method allows for adequate access to the existentiell phenomena, or perhaps is inappropriate to the task. What Jaspers created was a kind of typology or catalogue of world-views, of the possibilities and varieties of formations [*Gestaltung*] of human existence – and, according to Heidegger, Jaspers, as it were, disregarded the *individual actual existence*. Or is it not that he contemplated a kind of abstract "region of the possible", which is, from the point of view of an individual existence, *ubique et nusquam*? Heidegger, tutored in Husserlian phenomenology, places emphasis on the self-givenness and facticity:

> "The crucial thing is that *I have myself*, the fundamental experience in which I encounter myself, so that I, living in this experiencing, can *accordingly* ask about the meaning of my 'I am'."[23]

Heidegger is not satisfied with stressing just the facticity of *his* "I am". In order to express the priority of the unique *own* experience, the fundamental experience which only legitimizes philosophical statements, he understands this reflexive, philosophical self-relation as the *concerned having of one-self* [*bekümmertes* Haben seiner selbst].[24] The fundamental experience is concentrated and singled out by this concern or interest in one's existence and thus protected from any possible objectivization. Again, emphasis is on the *individuality* and *facticity*: "in earnest concern [Bekümmerung] we experience the specific self-past, self-presence, self-future, not as mere time-schemes of objective ordering of things, but in its un-schematic meaning of concernment [Bekümmerungssinn] which captures the How of the actual experience."[25] What philosophy as such is all about is this "self", this "historical existing self". In this respect, philosophy is only meaningful insofar as it is taking place as the reflexive self-relation, as long as it is oriented towards the actual, individual existence – namely to the philosopher's own existence.

It goes without saying that in a few years' time, Heidegger will radically reevaluate his idea of the meaning of philosophy. This will no longer be situated in the element of reflection of the individual existence, but it will become the return to the question of being as such. Surely, at least in *Being and Time*, he will still take the departure point in human existence. His method of the hermeneutics of facticity will value the

23 Heidegger, *Anmerkungen*, op. cit., 29.
24 Ibid., 30.
25 Ibid., 32 n.

existentiell experience, yet only as a preliminary lead of the existential *Dasein-Analyse*.[26]

Insofar we have followed the almost comical attempt by Jaspers and Heidegger to delimitate their positions one against another; in doing so, they eventually criticize one another in the same respect. Perhaps then we could say that they both want the same thing: there is no dispute about them both striving for philosophy as something more than just a university subject. The medium of philosophy, which makes up their connection, has nothing to do with the "armchair philosophy" – they both despise it. We have also seen that Jaspers, in his *Psychology of World-Views*, refuses to take up the role of a true philosopher and describes his position as that of a *psychologist*, yet later he will claim his philosophy to be a nostalgia for something lost, an echo of theology. His notion of philosophy synthesizes two aspects: philosophy is, according to Jaspers, no mere teaching, but only becomes what it is through the actual appropriation, in the inward self-formation of the individual. Philosophy provides with grounds of comfort and philosophical activity is this self-relation, this self-assertion. The second aspect is that Jaspers understands the fundamental foothold as something transcending, it transcends or pierces through the boundary of the Encompassing and thus it is, eventually, the *absolute*. Jaspers' understanding of philosophy is consequently related closely to the traditional concept of *theology*.

In Heidegger's case, we have so far followed his surprising early attempt at formulating his philosophical project as the thematization of the facticity of individual existence. He concurs that philosophy is no mere teaching, but it is the expression and reflection of a *concerned self-relation*. Yet, how about the second aspect we have analyzed in Jaspers' case – is it possible, in Heidegger, to suggest the proximity of philosophy and theology?[27] Recall that Jaspers called Heidegger's philosophy a kind of combination of earnest nihilism and charlatan mysticism. Heidegger himself proclaims his philosophy to be consciously atheistic. But, such position is not to be understood as looking away from the absolute, as a kind of sweeping philosophy clean of theology. On the contrary, it can only happen with the conception of God, as "raising hand against God" and only then it is an honest position.[28] Heidegger's refusal of the absolute

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26 It should be noted that even in *Sein und Zeit* we do indeed find evidence of Heidegger's earlier "project", esp. see §§ 62–63. How else are we to read utterances like: "*Die Frage nach dem Ganzseinkönnen ist eine faktisch-existenzelle. Das Dasein beatwortet sie als enschlossenes*" (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, op. cit., 309, author's emphasis); or even: "Aber liegt der durchgeführten ontologischen Interpretation der Existenz des Daseins nicht eine bestimmte ontische Auffassung von eigentlicher Existenz, ein faktisches Ideal des Daseins zugrunde? Das ist ind der Tat so" (ibid, 310)?

27 N. B. What I have in mind is a concrete elaboration of such relation, not the universal or general onto-theo-logical nature of any traditional philosophizing as Heidegger understands it.

28 Cf. M. Heidegger: Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles, in: H.U. Lessing (ed.): *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geisteswissenschaften*, Bd. 6, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1989, 246.

is a "qualified" decision. For this reason, Günter Figal (*1949) understands Heidegger's philosophy as from the beginning continuing coming to terms [*Auseinandersetzung*] with theology as a possibility or as an alternative of the philosophical stance which Heidegger himself adopted.[29] Figal stresses that this is in spite of or in the face of Heidegger's conviction that a relation to the transcendence of faith is a fundamental aspect of individual human life. Perhaps Nietzsche put it best in Zarathustra's speech: "You should seek your enemy, wage your war and for your thoughts! And when your thought is defeated, then your honesty should cry out in triumph even for that!"[30] Heidegger's stance to the theological aspect of philosophizing is consciously and, said with Nietzsche, *honestly* negative.[31]

Now let me stress and point out two key aspects which make up the actual medium of Heidegger's and Jaspers' philosophical interest:

(1) *Firstly*, there is the aspect of the formalized or merely theoretical contemplation of existence – and they both, eventually, reject such *abstraction*. Heidegger rejects it as being only a marginal or insignificant moment and he himself never put forward any "theories of existence" in this sense. The earlier Heidegger of 1921 situates his philosophical interest in the self-relation of the philosopher to his own existence. Nor in his later philosophy does he formulate any theory of existence, for he understood his thought as an attempt not at a thematization of existence, but as the restoration of the question of being as such. Jaspers rejects the same abstraction for the reason that this theory would not communicate anything, it would be deprived of its medium, of the actual existence and thus it would become hollow talk.

(2) The *second* aspect they both deal with is *theology*. Jaspers openly confesses himself to echoing it for he understands philosophy as a movement of transcendence because it uncovers and mediates the ways how the Encompassing opens up or how transcendence shines through the cracks in the Encompassing. Conclusively, the only philosophically important question is that of a foothold or of a resting place which would protect human existence against nihilism. Heidegger delimitates himself radically from the theological aspect of philosophy, against God himself, and – in paraphrasing Figal's interpretation – his atheistic coming to terms with God creates a kind of a negative imprint of the absolute in every sentence of his philosophical work (at least as long as it positions itself honestly "against God"). Theology is an alternative and a countermovement to his own efforts. It should not surprise us to find out that it was Heidegger who, in his letter to Jean Wahl, formulated the two extreme aspects of philosophy of existence like this: on one side it

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29 G. Figal: *Heidegger zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius 1992.

30 F. Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, transl. by Adrian del Caro, Cambridge: CUP 2006.

31 N. B. Heidegger's view of the *divine* changes fundamentally in the period of his thinking which is announced by the famous *Letter on Humanism* [*Brief über den Humanismus*, 1946]. It should be also noted that Heidegger situates the change of perspective expressed in the *Letter* in the mid-1930, i. e. in the period of the followed Heidegger-Jaspers-Wahl controversy.

is endangered by *abstraction*, on the other side there lies the danger of *theology*.[32]

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There is one last important connection between Jaspers and Heidegger. Even though we have mentioned Jaspers' assertion that they differ substantially in regard to the contents they employ in philosophizing, they also: "have a kind of critical-negative stance to the traditional school-philosophy and a certain *dependence on Kierkegaard's thinking*."[33] Jaspers refers to Kierkegaard as to the common denominator of his relation to Heidegger.

In the last section of this paper, I will briefly investigate the question in how far can Kierkegaard be understood as the common denominator of that *ethos* of philosophy of existence which, in the conceptual field between abstraction and theology, constituted itself as an actual self-relation of the philosophizing individual.

Søren Kierkegaard[34] referred to himself primarily as a *religious author*, he avoided the label of a philosopher: yet much of his distaste for the term "philosopher" was due to his fear that he could be mistaken for a follower of the Philosophy in his day (i. e. System), of Hegel's speculative philosophy. In his works, Kierkegaard undoubtedly addressed the essential tension between the extremities of abstraction and theology. He understood the danger of hollow thinking which loses its lively character and succumbs to abstraction. He also reflected on Christianity as transcending the sphere of reason or as a nullification of philosophizing. Kierkegaard was well aware of this conceptual framework. Yet, as long as he was just a religious writer, did he also develop his thought within the framework of abstraction and theology or did he simply leave it in favor of Christianity?

What would be the point in philosophy if all it took was merely God's grace and faith? Kierkegaard, through the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus, stressed that only God can "draw" man to him and man cannot do anything, anything at all. Jaspers' notion of a foothold becomes conceptualized as *eternal happiness* in Kierkegaard. There is no other true interest in human existence other that this eternal happiness. Existence, verged between life and death, a sickness unto death even, is deprived of any possibility of reaching the foothold of eternal happiness all by itself – it is completely dependent of God's grace. Yet, and this is a fascinating aspect of Kierkegaard's thought, in order for this drawing to God to take place, there is something the individual must do. He not only can, but has to prepare himself in an inward movement, in becoming a spirit, a free individual, who understands himself in his existence.[35] This condi-

32 Cf. *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 277.

33 Ibid., 278 (italics mine).

34 I have presented a concise interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophical work elsewhere (J. Marek: *Kierkegaard. Nepřímý prorok existence* [*Kierkegaard. The Indirect Prophet of Existence*], Praha: Togga 2010).

35 For a more concise exposition of the idea of a dual movement of becoming a spirit and being drawn to God, cf. J. Marek: Anti-Climacus, in: *Kierkegaard*

tion spelled out by Anti-Climacus finds another expression in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* through another pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. The inward activity and the self-relation of the individual are the hallmarks of the *subjective thinker*.[36]

"The subjective thinker's task is *to understand himself in existence*."[37] The emphasis is placed on one-self, no one else, this individual actual existence. The task is to understand oneself in this existence, or: "In all his thinking, then, he [the subjective thinker. – *J. M.*] includes the thought that he is someone existing".[38] Once he becomes truly conscious of this existence it yields passion – his thinking becomes passionate, concerned for his existence. Passion accompanies such thinking, it intensifies it, protects it from objectivity, for its only interest is this individual existence. Only then does the individual, according to Climacus, relate truly to himself and understand his existence as a task, as an appeal, as the *pathos* of relation to eternal happiness. At its most intensified form, such thinking reaches the ultimate point when it cannot proceed through thinking but uncovers the standpoint of faith and of the paradoxical religiousness – Christianity.

The project of the subjective thinking is Kierkegaard's rendering of such a philosophical thematization of the individuality of human existence, which understands subjective thinking primarily as a self-relation and as an inward action. This action is a preparation or existentiell "completion" of the individual's self in order to be ready for faith and God's grace. Nonetheless, we must also emphasize that the subjective thinking should be understood as a stand-alone, independent *ethos* of thinking or philosophizing which, taking a departure from the individual existence, takes place in the conceptual field between abstraction and theology.

Kierkegaard conceived of the trichotomous structure "abstraction – philosophy – theology" dialectically. The standpoint of abstraction was the Hegelian idealism, philosophy was then the transition sphere where the inwardness of the subjective thinker becomes articulated and self-related, so that, finally, the possibility of Christianity as the true goal and *telos* could be uncovered. Kierkegaard's *prophetic philosophy* points to Christianity as to that which oversteps the boundaries of philosophy. But still, it was Kierkegaard's work which explicitly and unambiguously articulated the *turn to existence in philosophy* as a question which necessarily belongs in the framework of *abstraction* and *theology*.

Research: Sources, Reception, Resources, Vol. 17, Ashgate Publishing, to be published in 2014/15. Also cf. the third "Practice" ("From on High He Will Draw All to Himself") in S. Kierkegaard: *Indøvelse i Christendom* [*Practice in Christianity*], *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* 12, København: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 2008, 149–253.

36 Cf. S. Kierkegaard: *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift* [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*], *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* 7, København: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 2002, 320–328.

37 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, transl. A. Hannay, Cambridge: CUP 2009, 294.

38 Ibid.

"OTHERED" EXISTENCE. THOUGHTS ON SØREN KIERKEGAARD, GEORG SIMMEL AND EMMANUEL LEVINAS' *DIACHRONY AND REPRESENTATION* (1982) IN A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Burkhard Liebsch[1]

Abstract

This essay deals with Levinas' interpretation of what it means to exist *othered* – that is, to live a life in the wake of the other's effacement. The author compares the notion of othered existence with Søren Kierkegaard's and Georg Simmel's "existential" thinking on the one hand and with Michael Theunissens' concept of a reifying and alienating *Veranderung* on the other hand in order to put forward the question what is at stake in an inevitably *othered* existence that proves from the start to be inspired by an original *othering* and suffers time and again from violent *otherings* which we inflict on each other.

Keywords: existence, othering, subjectivization, violence.

> "I welcome every philosophy of existence that leaves open the door leading to otherness; but I know none that opens it far enough".
>
> *Martin Buber*[2]

I

In our everyday life we usually take it for granted that everybody is a distinct human being that differs from others and, therefore, can be distinguished in comparison with them. Moreover, we take it for granted that everybody attaches more or less great importance to his/her own being-different (being other than others). In this way, we presuppose a notion of *comparative difference* which implies that we are or want to be different from others – in comparison with them, even if we bear no comparison with them when they seem to be different beyond all comparison...

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2 M. Buber: *Philosophical Interrogations*, ed. Sydney and Beatrice Rome, New York: Rinehart and Winston 1964, 22 f.; cf. P. Mendes-Flohr: Jewish Co-Existentialism. Being with the Other, in: J. Judaken, R. Bernasconi (eds): *Situating Existentialism*, New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press 2012, 237–255.

Georg Simmel referred to this notion of comparative difference in his theoretical sociology where he described the sociality of human beings as originating from a fundamental sensitivity to difference (*Unterschiedsempfindlichkeit*).[3] We are deeply concerned with our difference *vis-à-vis* others, he speculated, precisely because we *are not* simply different but, rather, have to maintain our individuality by way of permanent differentiation. When this effort grows weak or deteriorates, our difference from others runs the risk of fading away – up to a point where we appear to be so much like others that we finally may become indistinguishable. According to Simmel, we *are* not simply others in contrast to others but, rather, we must be concerned about our own otherness inasmuch as it can only be secured by processes of differentiation that establish, maintain and defend differences which are never simply "there" or "given". Being afraid of becoming indistinguishable, we may therefore resort to *making* ourselves and others *others*, that is, to "other" ourselves and them at all costs.

But, you may ask, should we be at all afraid of losing our individuality (which I take here as referring to our comparative and distinguishable difference with respect to others)? Aren't we individual human beings willy-nilly and inevitably? It was primarily[4] Søren Kierkegaard who sought to teach everybody this lesson: nobody is a more or less trivial, exchangeable member of the human species, a mere individuation of the human race or an example of the same genus; and we are not united by resemblance or common nature.[5] Rather, and paradoxically, *everybody is unique* in his/her own life. Everybody is in that sense "different" (if she or he only realizes this). And it is this inevitable and inalienable uniqueness that we share as human beings. Seemingly, this ontological mark of distinction needs no reference to comparative difference.[6] Everybody seems to be, in the very facticity (to borrow a term from Heidegger[7]) of his or her existence, an *individual* and ultimately a *unique self* that is primarily, if not exclusively, related to itself.

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3 G. Simmel: *Soziologie*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1992, 657, 684; cf. B. Liebsch: *Zerbrechliche Lebensformen. Widerstreit – Differenz – Gewalt*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 2001, ch. 9: 5.

4 There were, to be sure, "precursors" of Kierkegaard in this respect – such as F.D.E. Schleiermacher who cannot be taken into account here.

5 A thought that was later radicalised by Levinas: The others with whom I am obsessed in the other do not affect me as united with my neighbour by membership in a common genus. The others concern me from the very beginning. Here fraternity precedes the commonness of a genus. My relationship with the other as neighbour gives meaning to my relations with all others. Cf. E. Levinas: *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Dordrecht: Springer 1991, 159. In contrast to Kierkegaard, for Levinas it is the proximity of the other (who always remains distant, but can confront us in the face of any other) that "unites" us.

6 S. Kierkegaard: *Abschließende unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift zu den philosophischen Brocken*, Bd. 2, Gütersloh: Mohn 1989, 239 (= *Samlede Vaerker Bd. VII*, 461).

7 T. Kisiel: *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1995.

One may "forget" this, however, and lose sight of what it means to be an individual. It is well known that Kierkegaard accused modern societies of dissolving any true acknowledgement of what it means to be an individual. Through its production of the false idol of "the public", he lamented, they divert attention away from our individuality to a mass public that loses itself in the productions of the media and in the consumption of things which keep our individuality distracted in the sphere of "superficiality" (*Äußerlichkeit*). Nevertheless, Kierkegaard insisted, we are individual selves who are related to themselves in a singular, "incomparable" way. To "forget" this cannot amount to an ontological mutation which would make a sort of selfless thing out of us. The recovery of a true self that has been hitherto forgotten always remains possible. The self may become altered and estranged in manifold ways. Its alteration (*Veranderung*), however, is in Kierkegaard's perspective never irreversible.

For Kierkegaard a striving *to other* oneself or others seems to make no sense. Everybody should take care of him- or herself in order to become a true self that deserves the name. And to secure one's true self no reference to others is necessary[8] – with the exception of the absolute other (God[9]) and his commandments (love your neighbour as you love yourself[10]). In our normal everyday social life the experience of *being othered* (or *to other oneself* in order to become like others…) implies for Kierkegaard only a dangerous distraction from the true relation of the self to itself – from which he wanted to erase any irritating comparative otherness insofar as it entices us to fix our attention on a permanent striving for *distinction from others*.[11]

To be *othered* or to experience *othering* (*verändert sein* or *Veranderung erfahren*) means here: to be threatened by an alteration that seems to make *something* or *someone* else out of us. In this double sense the German Kierkegaard-expert Michael Theunissen coined the term *Veranderung*. Someone undergoes a *reifying othering* when he or she becomes *something* else. In contrast, *Veranderung* as *personalized othering* implies becoming like *an other* – with the possible consequence that

8 Indeed, "being unreservedly oneself can be preserved [if we follow Kierkegaard] at the cost of sociality", comments T. Eagleton: *Trouble with Strangers. A Study of Ethics*, Chichester: Wiley & Sons 2009, 167.

9 J. Habermas: *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1988, 33, 203.

10 An interesting implication of Kierkegaard's downplaying of the significance of the other for the self is his description of self-love and loving the neighbour as fundamentally one and the same thing. Cf. S. Kierkegaard: *Works of Love, Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton: Barnes & Noble 1998, 22–24.

11 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard. In contrast to my interpretation, we read here that in *Johannes Climacus* (in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*) the facticity of individual subjects refers to "what is personal to the individual – what makes the individual who he is in distinction from others".

one seems to live like others (for example in a community that forges its members into a seemingly homogenous collectivity).[12]

Obviously, in both cases *othering* that produces an *othered* self has a pejorative meaning: the self is imagined as becoming someone or something other *which it is not* and *which it in truth can never become*. Consequently, when we have gone through *othering* we should do our best (in a Kierkegaardian perspective) to reverse this process in order to undo it and ultimately to rid ourselves of an otherness that was imposed on us and threatens us with estrangement in experiences of reification or alienation.

Fascinating as it may be, Kierkegaard's critique of any form of *othering* is ultimately not convincing insofar as the self depends on its own testimony, which must be credible and must therefore be addressed to others.[13] The image of a self that retreats from any social relation in which it could fall prey to a reifying or alienating *othering* contradicts any possibility of attestation of a self that desires to find its credibility proven. Does it follow from this that *comparative existence reigns over us* and that we cannot escape from being *othered* by others who in turn must face the experience of being *othered* by us?

This seems indeed to follow from the most prominent current usage of the notion *othering* in (postcolonial) cultural criticism, which at first glance is a far cry from Simmel, Kierkegaard and Theunissen's social ontology. According to an already widespread understanding, *othering* means primarily a process that *identifies others* who are deemed to be *different* (in a negative sense) from oneself, from the social unit one belongs to or from what is regarded as the mainstream. This process can work as a rhetorical device in which one group is seen as "us" and another group as "them" so that positions of domination and subordination are reinforced and reproduced. In this sense the "othering" of blackness is commonplace.[14] Numerous minority populations suffer time and again from *othering* in this sense[15] that is *inflicted* on them with discriminatory consequences. To *other* others (for example disabled people), then, means to disregard, to devaluate or to discredit them.[16] In postcolonial theory (often with reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak[17]) the notion

12 M. Theunissen: *Der Andere. Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart* [1965], Berlin: de Gruyter 1977, 84.

13 I have shown this elsewhere; cf. B. Liebsch: *Prekäre Selbst-Bezeugung. Die erschütterte Wer-Frage im Horizont der Moderne*, Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2012.

14 See http://www.wordnik.com/words/othering.

15 Even the American President Barack Obama is an object of *othering* (by so-called "birthers" – questioning President Obama's country of birth – who claim that "*there's just no way this Obama guy is one of us*").

16 Prominent examples demonstrate that *othering* reaches beyond defining the self as superior and the other as inferior insofar as it may provide a rationale to justify killing others (native Indians for example), taking their land and enslaving them. See http://socialsciencelite.blogspot.de/2009/08/politics-of-othering.html.

17 In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak describes the process through which a "colonial subject" (the "unnamed subject of the Other of Europe") is

of *othering* referred to colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from an imperial centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by an imperial subject that has (allegedly) the power to "construct" others *as others* so that they have no alternative but to internalise the *othered* image of their existence.

In a more radical sense *othering* not only identifies and discriminates others (who are supposed to be already there) but *makes* them others or *creates* them as such. Their very otherness, then, seems to be a product of a social "technique" of *othering*. In this more radical sense of the term, *othering* does not only amount to an *othered* image of others but, rather, to a construction of their existence *as* others who consequently seem to be radically dependent on the subjects who *othered* them.

Construction, however, is not tantamount to fabrication. The other must somehow always already be there so that in relation to him or to her a construction can operate that may construe him or her *differently* and *other* him or her in that sense. Therefore, *othering* must presuppose others to whom this process can relate. Otherwise *othering* would produce a completely fictional otherness. *Othering*, seen that way, is not a radical construction of otherness out of nothing but, rather, a process of perceiving, interpreting and treating others in ways that give them the impression of becoming (or being made) *other than they feel or claim to be*. In this sense *othering* seems to be unavoidable in relation to everybody we happen to come across. There are only some others who are selectively *othered* others in the aforementioned sense. These are others who realize that they are *othered* in a pejorative sense and who often find themselves *othered* as another group to whose perceived weakness, defects and faults others point to make themselves look stronger or better. In relations to *othered* others differences are emphasized while similarities are hidden – eventually up to a point where one seems to have little or nothing in common any more with discriminated others.

In recent contributions to on-going debates about *othering* we read that unfortunately "we cannot get away from the concept of the other, as it is too crucial for an understanding of the self. What we can do, though, is to limit the ways in which we group people up and construct them as something entirely different from an imagined 'us'. The power of definition is a strong one, and when used in the context of othering, it continues to reinforce discrimination."[18] This quotation makes two presuppositions quite clear that come into play where the politically dangerous consequences of *othering* are considered: (i) everybody is an *other* to others; (ii) everybody may therefore become the target of processes of

placed in the position of other who then becomes appropriated by assimilation. Spivak insists on intellectual's complicity in the persistent constitution of others as their own self's shadow. See G. Spivak: Can the subaltern speak? In: C. Nelson, L. Grossberg (eds): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education 1988, 271–313.

18 Cf. the introductory Essay *'The Other' and 'Othering'* by S.R. Engelund, see http://newnarratives.wordpress.com/issue-2-the-other/other-and-othering-2/

forced *othering* that make her or him even *more* an other to others – with discriminatory, disparaging and even radically demeaning consequences that may eventually amount to a strict exclusion of totally *othered* others.

To be sure, such extreme consequences are not regularly the outcome of practices of *othering*. It seems, however, that nothing more is required than to be an *other* to others in order possibly to become the victim of radical *othering*. Seen that way, *othering* plays on the register of *Veranderung* in Theunissen's sense. This means that *othering* subdues the uniqueness and singularity of the self and threatens to make *someone else* or even *something other* out of it. Thus, this process appears to be a form of violence that we should try to resist as far as possible.

Insofar, however, as we cannot "renounce" our sociality altogether and retreat into a purely private (or "idiotic") life, we are doomed to *other* others and to be ourselves subjects and objects of processes of *othering*. The only alternative we really have seems to be to look for at least *less* violent if not *non*-violent forms of *othering* that take into account whether or not others can live with them, acknowledge, accept and recognize them. Does this consideration lead us back to well-known forms of dialectical relations between the self and the other? Do we have to accept Hegel's famous description of the struggle for recognition as it was outlined in his *System der Sittlichkeit* and in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as the normative yardstick of any adequate description of these relations?[19]

Without doubt, Kierkegaard would have objected to this contention. He maintained that the unique, singular self cannot and should not rest on any *othering* that would conjure up the danger of a reification and/or alienation in the social world of comparative existence.[20] We exist – if we take him seriously in this respect – as unique and singular selves on our own account and at our own risk – under the "vertical" super-vision of an absolute other, to be sure, who was *othered* by human beings and who in turn *others* us without any regard to the "horizontal" otherness of others. Apart from this radical *othering* – paradoxically *vis-à-vis* an other who never makes himself visible and refuses to turn up in any way[21] – the self must not regard itself as necessarily *othered*. In a Kierkegaardian perspective *othering* is restricted to a *contingent effect of our exposition to the view and judgment of others who do not contribute essentially to our being* (*as others in relation to other others*).

The situation changes dramatically when we take into account Levinas' critique of Hegel and Kierkegaard in his radical revision of modern social philosophy. Levinas rejects the model of the struggle for recognition that proceeds via the negativity of reciprocal *othering* (on

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19 R. Bernasconi: Levinas face to face – with Hegel, in: *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology 13*, 1982, 3: 267–276; B. Keintzel, B. Liebsch (eds): *Hegel und Levinas*, Freiburg i. Br., München: Alber 2010.

20 K. Löwith: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, Hamburg: Meiner 1986, 127 ff. Löwith points to the apparent paradox that everybody should (in Kierkegaard's perspective) count as an "exception".

21 J. Starobinski: *Das Leben der Augen*, Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Wien: Ullstein 1984.

the one hand) *and,* at the same time, Kierkegaard's restriction of the self to a form of unique existence (on the other hand) that seems to be entirely unrelated to any *othering* – insofar at least as it does not depend on any this-worldly other in order to become a true self. On the contrary, if we believe Kierkegaard, it must seek to fend off any reference to others that would imply reification and/or alienation of the self.

By way of his critique of Hegel and Kierkegaard, Levinas discovered another possibility of combining *othering* and existence. Instead of opposing the uniqueness of every individual human being to any *othering* whatsoever and instead of handing the self over without reserve to reifying or alienating dialectical processes of reciprocal *othering* he drew attention to an *"always already" othered sense of human existence*. According to Levinas, human life in its very singularity does not owe this sense to its striving to become true in the fight for recognition, but to the *gift of inspiration* by the other (who can be *any* other). Levinas does not take recourse to a vertical, absolute otherness in order to demonstrate this inspiration. As a social philosopher he insisted on the necessity and possibility of *showing* how such an inspiration can and *must* affect us in our relation to the other.[22] The other, indeed any other, "gives" us responsibility for himself – whether we like it or not, Levinas claims. Therefore, the gift of responsibility has always already affected us and inspires us – even before we can try to refuse it. Whether or not this can be demonstrated with a phenomenological or any other method, however, seems to be questionable – even for Levinas himself. – Before I elaborate this point a little more, I should like to state briefly in what respect this new conception of a radical *othering* of human existence deviates from the course of the aforementioned authors.

Levinas reads Kierkegaard with Heidegger's eyes, as it were. That means primarily that he refuses to understand the existence of a unique self on the basis of the ontology of on-handness (*Vorhandenheit*[23]). Instead, he adopts from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* the *transitive* notion of existence which means that we exist in our lives in a temporal form. The temporality of human existence, however, does not of itself reveal that it is basically concerned about itself. For Levinas the ontological notion of self-care cannot do justice to the temporality of human existence. Instead, he maintains, human existence discloses in its temporality its openness to the other who can never be re-presented. That the other is experienced as an *other* means precisely that he escapes any presentation and re-presentation.[24] The self always already comes too late to get hold of the other. This does not mean that the other, who seems to have irrevocably retreated in his diachrony, cannot affect us. On the contrary, claims Levinas, it is the other in his non-(re-)presentable and neverthe-

22 Even if that relation turns out to be a "relation without relation"; see E. Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, transl. A. Lingis, Duquesne: Duquesne University Press 1969, 295.

23 I draw here on T. Kisiel's translation of Heidegger's term *Vorhandenheit*.

24 P. Ricœur: *Main Trends in Philosophy*, New York, London: Holmes & Meier 1979, 371.

less non-indifferent diachrony that inspires us. Precisely because he cannot be fully grasped by way of perception, cognition and recognition he disquiets us. His non-representable diachrony does not indicate a defect of our capacity to synchronize everything that we experience in our present. Rather, it indicates, in a *non-privative* sense, that the temporality of our being-present can never be self-sufficient and that it is exposed to a radical otherness that resists any sublation in human existence. At this point Levinas parts company with ontology[25] and paves the way for a radically new ethics which pretends to describe human existence as *othered* from the start.

To the extent that he refers to the human self at all (in a sense that is comparable to Kierkegaard's notion)[26], Levinas only takes it as a starting point from which we must "ask back" in order to discover the trace of an original *othering* that seems to be inscribed in its very being from the beginning. Only belatedly can we ask where that *othering* originates – if not only by way of "different" others who try to *other* us.[27]

In contrast to an attribution of *othering* to external others Levinas insists that we *exist*[28] a life (each of us in a *singular* way so that we come together in a *multiple existing*) that proves to be open (and vulnerable) *vis-à-vis* an otherness that *others* our existence in a radical sense from within. The other is always already "there" when we relate to him – even when we try to restrict our life to our own allegedly incomparable uniqueness. This means delimitating the borders of a self, retreating into a privatized form of life that in the end may try to cut any relation with a social world that threatens it with processes of reification and alienation. In this point, Levinas neither follows Kierkegaard nor resorts to Hegel. Rather, he dissociates himself from Kierkegaard and Hegel at the same time in describing human existence as *in itself*, internally, always already *othered*. Consequently, in his view there is no way out into a self that could rid itself from any reifying and/or alienating *othering*. The self, rather, proves, in its very existence, to be always already and in an inalienable sense *othered*.

On the other hand, *othering* in Levinas' understanding is not the product of efforts of others *to make* someone, an individual self, a whole group of people, a class or a race, others in a sense that the specific objects of such an "attack" might possibly experience as forced, offensive or violent. Rather, the original *othering* that Levinas discovered in the "happening" (*Geschehen, Ereignis*) of human existence turns out to

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25 R. Bernasconi: No Exit: Levinas' Aporetic Account of Transcendence, in: *Research in Phenomenology*, 2005, 35: 101–117.

26 Levinas primarily criticized the category of *sameness* – which he never distinguished from the *self* in a clear-cut way.

27 P. Ricœur: *Autrement. Lecture d'*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence *d'Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: PUF 1997. Ricœur sympathizes with Levinas' search for a "vraie altérité, avant l'altérité de l'autrui dans l'approche et la proximité" (p. 8). He is afraid, however, that Levinas' anti-ontological thinking in the end leaves his ethics without any adequate language.

28 Levinas uses this term in a *transitive* sense and is here close to Heidegger in this respect.

be a *pathological event* (*Widerfahrnis*) in the Aristotelian sense of *pathos*. This original *othering* happens to us in our very *passivity* – which does not mean that we are merely causally affected by the otherness of the other as if we were mere objects (*verändert* in Theunissen's sense). Rather, our passive being-affected by the otherness of the other calls for our understanding (if only belatedly) of what it means, in what respect it challenges us and how we can or should pick it up.

In the second part of my presentation I shall try to elaborate this consideration in more detail. In order to do this, I come back to Levinas' handling of phenomenology, especially to those of his writings that cast doubt on whether it can adequately take the diachrony of the other into account. Levinas expected phenomenologists to do this, but his lifelong dealing with phenomenological methods ultimately led him to realize their limits with respect to the otherness of the other. In turn, he insisted in such a rigorous manner on this notion that he provoked the suspicion that he advocates a *theological turn* of phenomenology that ultimately jeopardizes the whole endeavour of a social ontology which claims adequately to describe human relations as forms of *othering*.[29]

II[30]

The experience of being exposed to the face of the other leads to the kernel of what Derrida called Levinas' "ethics of ethics". He claims that we find in this experience – beneath the surface of moral claims, judgments and justifications, of utilitarian justice, ethos and virtues, deep beneath even the *forum internum* of our conscience – the source of an absolute responsibility for the other which no excuse can relativize. To be under the other's eyes exposes us to the imperative of being responsible for him, a responsibility which allows no exception or substitution of ourselves as responsible beings. It is I who am required not to let him die alone, to care for him, to share... Levinas' key concept for what forces us to respond responsibly to the other is "impossible indifference". The face of the other places us before the demand to be responsible, that is, to affirm the demand as that which subjectivizes us as moral subjects. Whether it is the face of the other and our perceiving it or, inversely, our experience of being seen by the other – in any case we should expect that in Levinas' philosophy a phenomenology of perception takes a central place. This is, however, not the case.

In Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, perceiving and the awareness of being perceived by others were described as modalities of experience, which pretends to offer us a world of objects under our con-

[29] D. Janicaud et al.: *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn". The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press 2000.

[30] This second part of my considerations was first presented under the title "Presence and taking leave of the other. Remarks on Levinas' ethical criticism of phenomenology" during the 19th international conference of the North-American Merleau-Ponty-Circle, Berry College, Rome/USA, 22 September 1994. I am grateful for Michael Smith's helpful comments on the paper.

trol. Nothing in perception seems to contradict this pretension, Levinas says. A phenomenology of the other-as-experienced will, therefore, never be able to uncover the imperative otherness of the other which subjectivizes experience itself and thus makes the responsible subject vulnerable through its being exposed to the demand of the other. Despite his well-known minute discussions of the phenomenological notions of intentionality, sensation, representation etc., Levinas' final judgment about phenomenology as a philosophy which is bound to the realm of experience appears to be clear-cut.

Phenomenology, he maintains, clings ontologically to the concept of a *conatus essendi*, that is, to a heathen type of existence to which the silent language and priority of the other's face as demanding responsibility remains alien. The other's alterity, which ethically subjectivizes our experience, is itself not subject to experience, Levinas claims. If this were the case, he continues, the *radical* alterity of the other, his otherness, could no longer be taken account of. In Levinas' opinion, the ethics of a vulnerable subject, which realizes the impossibility of being indifferent in being exposed to the otherness of the other, cannot be founded on a phenomenological basis alone. *Prima facie*, therefore, Levinas' humanism of the other seems to transcend phenomenology altogether without regret – at least insofar as phenomenology appears to preclude taking into account the absolute otherness of the other. Levinas expressly maintains that phenomenology clings to a notion of vision which amounts to an intelligibility of the other in terms of "a donation of alterity within presence". This intelligibility signifies, thus, "the reduction of the other [autre] to the Same, synchrony as *being* in its egological gathering".[31]

Levinas' long-lasting and thoroughgoing interest expecially in Husserl's phenomenology of passivity and intentionality[32] as well as his reinterpretation of the phenomenological notion of the openness of experience did not prevent him from this rather definite conclusion, which bears destructive implications, especially for the phenomenology of time. To be sure, Levinas was ready to acknowledge that his concept of passion is itself rooted in Husserl's uncovering of a primordial life which affects experience without depending on the previous consent of an intentional subject. Nevertheless, for Levinas this primordial life remains imprisoned in its own "re-presenting" structures. The other will always be the anticipated other or the remembered other. This also holds true at the most elementary levels of passive synthesis, of protention and retention, where the immediate present transcends and extends it-

31 E. Levinas: Diachrony and representation [1982], in: *Time and the Other* (and additional essays), transl. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1987, 99.

32 Which already began, as is well known, in the late twenties of the last century with his *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1930) and with his translation (together with M. Pfeiffer) of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*.

self towards the past and the future.[33] Wherever experience allows the other to appear, it will be under the conditions of the present, that is, under the conditions of re-presenting time. Levinas, however, maintains the radical incommensurability of the alterity of the other on one hand and the other-as-remembered and the other-as-anticipated on the other hand. By definition, the other as radically other cannot appear in the order of experience. The other-as-experienced has always already lost his radical alterity.[34]

While there is an immanent and constant transcendence of experiences and expectations towards the future, "presentational" time cannot transcend itself towards the time of the other. Put somewhat differently: if there is such a transcendence towards the time of the other, it is not a transcendence by way of experience and its temporality: it is, rather, the movement by which re-presenting experience, life and time themselves are to be regarded as transcended.

Levinas leaves no doubt that the notion of transcendence should not be understood here as signifying a secondary movement which opens re-presenting time towards the other. On the contrary, this notion is intended to signify a primary exposure of a respondent to the other which, by way of his power of subjectivization, calls the respondent into being.[35] Thus, the *subject-as-respondent* appears to be the answer which is given to the other who has always already been there and passed by. This "always already" refers to a time which must be absolutely different from linear, historical and cosmological time, in which anything now past must have been present some time ago. In contrast, Levinas repeatedly and vigorously maintains that the time of the other, his "authentic" time, has never been present and will never be present. The other's homeland is not cosmological time and human history, which reduces us to mundane events, mere temporal things. As part of the cosmological and historical order, the other would never be able to keep the reserve of his otherness. Therefore, for Levinas any idea of a history of the other must be misleading.[36]

Levinas makes us believe that the notion of an anterior past which has never before been present marks the precise point where we have to leave the phenomenology of time behind us in order to be able to

33 In the following discussion, I shall use the notion of "re-presenting" without discriminating primary and secondary remembering (or anticipation). Furthermore, I shall bracket the ontological question whether any re-presenting consciousness must be founded on the "presentifying" structure of being. ("Presentifying" is T. Kiesiel's translation for Heidegger's "Gegenwärtigung" as opposed to "Vergegenwärtigung".) Cf. C. Malabou, J. Derrida: *Counterpaths*, Stanford: Standford University Press 2004, 61, 133.

34 E. Levinas: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris: Vrin 1982, 234 f.

35 "The alterity of the other person to an ego is first ... the face of the other person obligating the ego, which, from the first – without deliberation – is responsive to the Other"; see: Levinas, *Diachrony and Representation*, op. cit., 105.

36 Cf., however, my evaluation of this consequence in: Geschichte und Überleben angesichts des Anderen. Levinas' Kritik der Geschichte, in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 44*, 1995/6, 3: 389–406.

take the alterity of the other into account. While Merleau-Ponty's late ontology of raw being as well as his aestesiological descriptions of *chair*, *chiasma* and *intercorporéité* are obviously present in Levinas' work[37], nowhere do we find special attention being paid to the internal development of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology of time and historicity. This fact is all the more striking as it was, ironically, Merleau-Ponty who first drew our attention to the notion of a past which never before was present[38], whereas Levinas claims that the phenomenology of time is unable to account for such a past, that is, the "diachronic" time of the other, the *refugium* of his authentic otherness. Several times Levinas extends this criticism expressly to the notion of *histoire fondamentale*, which he attributes to Merleau-Ponty.[39]

Merleau-Ponty's accounting for the limits of philosophical methods of reflection convinced him of a delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) with regard to primordial life which could never be overcome. I think however, Merleau-Ponty would not have gone so far as to claim an absolute pastness of the past which has never before been present. On the contrary, he insisted on an inherent relatedness of that which appears to be irreversibly withdrawn into the past on one hand and the posteriority on the other hand which gives us, paradoxically, access to that which has deprived us of a synthetic presence. In contrast, Levinas seems to be willing to claim an unconditional pastness of the past which has never been present in order strictly to avoid any contamination of the time of the other with an all-encompassing present.

Synchronizing presence, as the realm of existence and of any primordial subjective life, cannot be allowed to extend into the diachrony of the time of the other – not even in terms of a posterior presenting which would let him appear on the horizon of a delayed, remembering present. If we could ascribe to a remembering relation to the other the competence to recall him – despite his being always already retired into the past – then, nothing would force us eventually to get outside the prison which is the presence of our life. Presence is in Levinas' eyes the ontological fate of the subject and subjective primordial life; it is the fate to cling to itself; it is our fate to be condemned to seek to return to ourselves, no matter what we have lived through. This ontological script seems, once and for all, to have been written *apriori*.

In spite of his rigorous claim that the time of the other will forever resist primary and secondary remembering and that narrativity and historiography will forever remain blind with respect to diachrony, Levinas gives us, perhaps unwillingly, several indications of the necessity of steering a third way. With respect to diachronic time, Levinas speaks, for

37 E. Levinas: De l'intersubjectivité, in: O. Höffe, R. Imbach (eds) *Paradigmes de Théologie philosophique*, Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse 1983, 181–186.

38 M. Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, London: Routledge 1962, Part II, ch. I, § 13.

39 As far as I can see, this notion cannot, however, be found in Merleau-Ponty's writings, even not in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the book which Levinas obviously had in mind.

example, of a movement of intense yearning which does not force us to seek fulfilment, assimilation or alleviation of the pain we feel in view of the absent other. On the contrary, Levinas praises our longing for what we are deprived of, a longing that gains in intensity all the more in view of the irrevocable absence of the other. Is it merely an accident that Levinas often alludes to the experience of taking leave of someone, of *Abschiednehmen*, saying *adieu*, which calls to our minds the fact that any separation, any sorrow, will at one time be final? Without a doubt, Levinas did not have the psychoanalytic conception of *Trauerarbeit* in mind, that is, the psycho-economy of the work of mourning which, ultimately, on the libidinal plane literates the survivor from the unique human being whom he has lost. Rather, Levinas speaks of an *adieu* which deepens our relation to the other, the departed, who remains radically separated from us in spite of our desperate attempts to "keep him in mind". Needless to say, that Levinas' *adieu* is neither that of a speech-act nor the event in historical time which expresses our politeness in railway-stations and airports. Moreover, Levinas does not discuss an ontological notion of *Abschiedlichkeit* as an existential dimension of the process of existence.[40]

In *Totalité et infinie*, however, we find the son, who is the authentic future of his father, described as being lost in time, as forsaken, and as realizing his loneliness in an *Abschied* through which de dedicates his life as the survivor to the man he survived. The dedication of the son to the immemorial past into which the father has retired will not absolve the son – in spite of his inevitable affirmation that the father is forever lost – so that the separation must be accepted as a radical one. In order to be able to think the *Abschied* or *adieu*, we have to elaborate the notion of a relating back which does not annihilate the distance, deny the separation, or annul the absence – if only through remembering. We need such a notion of relating, says Levinas, which confirms what is lost as lost without synchronizing it in our presence. The trace of the other, he maintains, is exactly this notion.[41]

To be sure, the trace of the other is neither like a physiological engram nor like a historical datum, a retrograde signification which contributes to our knowledge and judgments about the past. The trace is neither a simple effect like a scratch or a footstep nor a residual sign which refers to former times. While the sign offers itself for retrograde interpretations in terms of narrative history, the authentic trace, that is, the trace of the other, disturbs the order of presence and re-presentation. Nevertheless, says Levinas, the trace is the presence of that which has never been present and remains forever past, whereas the signification and indication of historical traces only refer us to a past which in every case corresponds to a former presence. Now Levinas carefully seeks to avoid having this duality result in a dualism. The trace of the other is ambiguous enough to appear sometimes as a sign which refers

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40 An elaboration of this concept can be found in the author's *Geschichte im Zeichen des Abschieds*, München: Fink 1996.

41 E. Levinas: *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris: Vrin (4ème éd.), 1982, 187–202.

to his life as a historical being. However, "before" the trace signifies as a sign, Levinas insists, the face of the other bears the trace of the emptiness of his irrevocable absence as absolutely other. The trace-sign signifies as the trace of a trace which disturbs our presence by way of this irrevocable absence. In order to choose a metaphor (which Levinas might regard as misleading in this context, because it entices us to reactualize an ontology which he tried to surpass), the historical trace is the *Gestalt* which we "see" against the invisible background of the otherness of the other which can never directly appear as a phenomenon in our presence. Without the *Gestalt* of the significative or at least indicative trace, this background would be reduced literally to nothing. Where the concrete, historical traces fade away, our realization of being exposed to the otherness of the other must be seriously weakened. As a consequence, the otherness of the other would have to dissociate itself from any relation to its absolute past. That we are, at least in Levinas' radical ethical perspective, hostages of the other would, then, appear to be only the reverse of our complete historical ignorance with respect to this "fact".

On the other hand, where we feel content with a positivistic notion of empirical traces, where we hypostatize, in other words, a "historicity of death", to quote Merleau-Ponty[42], we forget the other as other altogether in order to reduce his life to a mundane thing, that is, to material for a necrology. Thus, paradoxically, it appears to be the *excess of the trace of the other as the surplus and invisible horizon of empirical historical traces of other human beings which allows the historical trace to play its genuine role.* Inversely, moreover, it is the historical trace which allows the trace of the other to affect us without becoming a mysterious intrusion of an alien, anonymous god.

Note that the horizon which burdens and enriches the historical traces of other human beings with the surplus of the otherness of the other must be thought of as exceeding the order of presence and visibility of the other itself. Thus, we do not have to do here with a contingent invisibility within visibility but, rather, with a transcendence of the visibility of the present other towards his radical otherness which will never become visible solely in terms of historical traces.[43]

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42 Merleau-Ponty coined this term in his essay *Le langage indirecte et les voix du silence*. Cf. *Signes*, Paris: Gallimard 1960, 49–104.

43 As long as we maintain a juxtaposition of empirical traces and the "authentic trace" of the other, however, the transcendence of visibility cannot be regarded as resulting in an absolute transcendence and absolute invisibility. For his part, Merleau-Ponty denies an absolute invisible altogether in order to reveal the invisibility which is inherent in "raw being". Thus, he declares, the invisible "is not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather, it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being." Cf. M. Merleau-Ponty: *The visible and the Invisible*, transl. A. Lingis, ed. C. Lefort, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1968, 151. Obviously, Merleau-Ponty was not willing to admit the notion of an invisibility beyond being.

With respect to a reinterpretation of the necessarily inherent relatedness of the trace of the other and historical traces, the thought of the late Merleau-Ponty can be our guide. It ought to be remembered that it was his late ontology which led us to decisive insights into "irrevocable absences" as inevitable temporal shadows of our experience, of any primordial life, which, thereby, was set out as being vulnerable through processes of *Entgegenwärtigung* (de-presenting).[44] Elsewhere I have shown that the pastness which is responsible for this de-presenting, never appears before a *Gestalt* emerges; on the contrary, its background comes into play only later as the past from which the *Gestalt* emerged. At least this comes close to Levinas' thought, namely, that this past seems never before to have been present and always already retired into the immemorial.

Could this not serve as a model for what Levinas describes as the enigma of a trace which proves the infinity of the otherness of the other without allowing him to appear? Can we maintain, in other words, that there is no re-presenting (*Gegenwärtigung*) without a correlative, invisible background of a radical de-presenting (*Entgegenwärtigung*) – just as there is no trace of the other in our presence without an irrevocable past which affects us through an enigmatic retreat of the other into a past which never promises to offer itself to a later present, a past, which had always already passed by and away? Levinas would probably raise objections, especially to the ontological cast of this question. He would insist, I suspect, that the absolute past into which the other retired does not depend in any way on a previous presence which would suffer only from a secondary de-presenting even if this de-presenting finally seems to lead into a pastness which was never and will never be present.

Where presence comes first, Levinas maintains, non-indifference surrenders to the conditions of the *being* of presence[45], whereas the absolute temporal exteriority of the other in truth exposes our presence to an unconditional vulnerability, that is, to the non-indifference of our responsibility for the other. Levinas would also object that what is truly lacking in phenomenology is not the *surplus* pertaining to a being which opens itself to ever renewed horizons of experience, but "the *better* of the proximity" of the other who *others* our existence and makes it vulnerable from the start.[46] Proximity, however, turns up as absolute remoteness if the trace of the otherness of the other does not *leave* a trace in our presence which, therefore, has to realize itself as being vulnerable.

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44 Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Visible and the Invisible* (p. 159): "We are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves. This does not even exclude the possibility that we find in our experience a movement toward that what could not in any event be present to us in the original and whose irremediable absence would thus count among our originating experiences."

45 Levinas' notion of "being-present", in *Diachrony and Representation* (p. 98).

46 E. Levinas: Wholly otherwise, in: R. Bernasconi, S. Critchley (eds): *Re-Reading Levinas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991, 3–10, especially p. 7.

My vulnerability is the other's gift, the gift which he gives to me because he will not disappear without leaving a trace.

> "But leaving the trace is also to *leave* it, to abandon it, not to insist upon it as a sign. It is to efface it. The concept of trace is inscribed in being effaced and leaving the traced wake of its effacement ... in the *re*treat, or what Levinas calls the 'superimposition.'"

> "The authentic trace ... disturbs the order of the world," says Levinas. "It comes 'superimposed.' ... Whoever has left traces in effacing his traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left."

Derrida comments on the structure of superimposition thus described as follows: it "menaces by its very rigor, which is that of contamination, any authenticity assured of its trace ('the authentic trace') and any rigorous dissociation between sign and trace." Levinas himself was ready to admit that the trace of the other, which is, to be sure, not a sign like any other, nevertheless "also plays the role of a sign... Yet every sign, in this sense, is a trace." Derrida concludes:

> "The word 'leave' (*laisser*) in the locution 'leave a trace' now seems to be charged with the whole enigma. It would no longer announce itself starting from anything other than the trace..."[47]

The ambiguous trace must be our starting point wherever the retreat of the other inspires our historical lives. To the retreat of the other, which is for Levinas the true source of our vulnerability, corresponds our aging, our growing old. On the other hand, aging means for Levinas precisely taking leave of the world and others, and thus most basically expresses our longing for the other – rather than of *Trauerarbeit* in the aforementioned sense. Taking leave for Levinas means our surpassing the *conatus essendi*, our ontological fate. The human *esse*, he says, is not *conatus* but "desinteressement et adieu".[48] Isn't, then, our presence precisely our being-as-inspired through the *adieu,* or, as I would prefer to say, *Abschied*, from the other? Our presence is not condemned to cling to its supposed ontological fate; as the presence of aging human beings, it instead presents itself in its vulnerability through the retreat of the other, who is always already gone. Isn't the *Abschiedlichkeit* of our lives, as we grow old from our earliest object-relations up to our last breath, the best evidence for the fact that the *au-delà-de-l'être* as our exposure to the other has its genuine place in the midst of our historical lives?

III

Levinas' social philosophy can be interpreted as a description of a radical *othering* that affects our lives from the very beginning. This phi-

47 J. Derrida: At this very moment in this work here I am, in: *Re-Reading Levinas*, op. cit., 37.

48 E. Levinas: La mort et le temps (Cours 1975–1976), in: *L'Herne*, 1991, 60: 25.

losophy seems to claim that we always already find ourselves *othered* by the other. It is, however, our share to *realize* this.[49] And the *othering* that Levinas has in mind is not the product of a social praxis of more or less polemic *otherings* that *make others* out of others in a way that they may not be able to accept. Rather, Levinas describes an *othering* that happens in the very passivity of our exposure to the claims of the other. In our being exposed to the otherness of the other our existence turns out to be an *othered* existence.

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49 Thus, the otherness of the other appeals to the self who alone can realize its significance. It is true: this otherness is not simply "given" (Eagleton, *Trouble*, 226, 237) insofar as it depends on the self in order to acquire significance for a practical life that cannot simply "read off" from the otherness of the other what it is called upon to do. Otherness is not another name for a "pure transcendence" (or a surrogate for it) that would determine the ultimate sense of our life. Rather, its source is the *surplus* of the other's alterity *beyond any relation in relation* with him or her. Thus, *without a relation to the other such a surplus cannot affect us*. Therefore, the surplus of otherness, as reminiscent of the Lacanian "Real" as it may be, is far from an absolute retreat into some region beyond any recognizable relationship (ibid., 230). It does not confiscate our independence in order to reduce us to spiritual slaves, rather, it calls for our own realization of its practical implications. Instead of "mesmerizing" us through a pure alterity denuded of all definitive cultural markers (ibid., 227) the interpellation of the other appeals to our practical subjectivity. (Cf. E. Levinas: *Autrement q'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Haag: Nijhoff 1978, 97 f.) This holds true especially in political respect, that is, in our life in a *dimension of tertiality* that is already present in the face of every single other. Indeed: the other can be anyone who may "befall" us in a proximate or distant encounter. It is misleading, however, to oppose an "absolute" otherness in its allegedly pure transcendence as a "portentously hollow" category to everyday fellowships (ibid., 240, 259) – as if any real communication would ruin absolute alterity that in turn would, on that score, be unable to inspire our daily social and political life. Instead of such a caricature of Levinas' ethical thinking one should take into account that he time and again insisted on the necessity of inscribing the ethical into the political – without thereby implying that the political could be in any sense reduced to the ethical. Neither did he advocate an "ethical fundamentalism" nor did he seek a reconciliation *à la* Hegel (ibid., 241). Rather, he located a multifaceted *différend* between the ethical and the political that turns up in and between modern societies – last but not least in the global horizon of an anonymous multitude of strangers. It is correct that Levinas nowhere offers an ethics for political institutions – afraid, as he was, that the "tyranny of the universal" that may be embodied in such institutions threatens the ethical with the permanent danger of being negated. It is also true that Levinas' core idea of an ethical "interruption" of the political is too loosely (if at all) connected with concrete perspectives on a common (good) life in just institutions. On the other hand, he was far from a Kierkegaardian denigration of democracies that could be accused of annulling "the pure difference of individuals" in an inauthentic, anonymous multitude (cf. ibid., 167, 237; P. Delhom, A. Hirsch (eds): *Im Angesicht der Anderen. Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophie des Politischen*, Berlin, Zürich: diaphanes 2005; A. Pinchevski: *By Way of Interruption. Levinas and the Ethics of Communication*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 2005; B. Liebsch: *Menschliche Sensibilität. Inspiration und Überforderung*, Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2008).

In his comments on the philosophy of Levinas, Ricœur has shown how this thought must lead us to a revised theory of the self which departs from Kierkegaard's premises. Each of us is not only a human being, a member of the human species and at the same time a completely, even absolutely different individual (as Habermas for example would have it[50]); rather, we are different selves who are radical others in relation to each other and at the same time *others in our own selfhood*.[51] That means, *we exist as others* in relation to others and even to ourselves. In Ricœur's perspective, Levinas has given a fascinating description of an otherness that affects each individual self in a way that precludes any sublation in the presence of the self. This does not mean, however, that the self must suffer an alienating *Veranderung* as described by Theunissen who took this notion as a pejorative one, thereby indicating that the self ideally *should not* be *othered* in this sense.

Levinas and Ricœur, in contrast to this implication, do not suggest such a privative and negative notion of *othering*; instead they insist that only a basically *othered* existence is not doomed to the ontological fate of a sort of self-care that is forever fixed on itself. *Othered* existence calls for a life that is from the very beginning concerned about its openness to the claim of the other – even if the other proves to be an alien or an enemy. Despite this ambiguity, Levinas[52] praises this openness – and even a vulnerability of human sensibility that exceeds what seems to be tolerable at all – as the form of an *unconditional hospitality* which makes our life a truly human life.

On a descriptive, phenomenological level this idea of openness cannot be convincingly demonstrated; it can only be *testified*. Levinas himself admitted this. Ultimately, he – a witness himself – gave us a new *interpretation* of human existence that does not reveal without further ado what makes it a *human* existence at all. To answer now – as Levinas' philosophy suggests – that only a radically *othered* existence offers at least the opportunity to live *a truly human, hospitable life*, however, is subject to political questioning. Politically, we do not exist *vis-à-vis* a single other but, rather, in diverse horizons of irreducible plurality. In the face of the other "the third" is always already co-present, claims Levinas himself.[53] The third is another other in the midst of numerous other others who are not only (directly or indirectly) related to each other by their radical otherness but, rather, who have to relate themselves to each other – if only to guarantee a minimum of hospitable life.

It is hard to believe that this should ever be possible by bypassing social practices which are inevitably structured by processes of *othering* as described by G. Simmel and many other authors (in different wording)

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50 J. Habermas: *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1997, 58.

51 P. Ricœur: *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1992.

52 In his writings on Marx, on "roughe states" and on the idea of cosmopolitics Derrida seems to follow Levinas on this track (not without political reservations, however).

53 E. Levinas: *Totalité et infini*, Hague: Nijhoff 1980, 187.

in recent debates on cultural theory. This means, our *othered* existence must situate itself in contexts of political co-existence which gravitate, as it were, around the question whether, in what respect and to what extent we can, we are allowed to or even must *other* others without doing violence to them. Yet how should we ever be able to come to terms with this question if we refuse to come back to a primary otherness that has always already affected us and, thus, set limits to any attempt to "make" the other an *other* at our own, sovereign discretion?[54]

Insofar as current cultural theory suggests that it is up to us to determine under what stipulations any other will count for us as an *other* it cannot indicate where such a procedure potentially harbours violence. On the other hand, Levinas' interpretation of what it means to exist *othered* – that is, to live a life in the wake of the other's effacement – does not tell us where exactly the demarcation line should be drawn between a non-violent relation to the other and forms of *othering* that refuse to do justice to others who will never accept being others only at some other's discretion. If we want to put the question adequately as to how it could be made possible that relations to others are non-violent or (if that is a lost cause) at least that there is only a minimum of violence in these relations[55], the contributions of a radical ethics *à la* Levinas, of ontological descriptions of forms of reifying and alienating *Veranderung* and of cultural unmaskings of more or less violent practices of *otherings* should unite. Only in concert will these contributions help us to clarify as far as possible what is at stake in an inevitably *othered* existence that proves from the start to be inspired by an original *othering* and suffers time and again from violent *otherings* which we inflict on each other – without finding shelter in an isolated, singular self that would turn out to be inalienable and independent of any other, any otherness, even of its own…[56]

54 Cf. G. Spivak: Subaltern Studies. Deconstructing Historiography, in: D. Landry, G. MacLean (eds): *The Spivak Reader*, London, New York: Routledge 1996, 203–235, esp. p. 217.

55 Cf. *Human Studies. A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences 36*, 2013, 1 – a special issue on the concept of violence.

56 I am grateful for Donald Goodwin's revision of my paper.

DEATH, SOLITUDE, AND BEING-WITH

Mélissa Fox-Muraton[1]

Abstract

The insistence on singularity, individuality and authenticity in existential philosophy seems to lead inevitably to some form of solipsism, rendering authors such as Sartre and Heidegger incapable of doing anything more than briefly sketching out a theory of *Mitsein*. This paper will suggest that the problems inherent in thinking being-with in existential philosophy stem from an erroneous understanding of the role of death and solitude with regard to the constitution of subjectivity and, by extension, intersubjectivity, and that a return to Kierkegaard's analyses of these themes can offer a new perspective on the possibility understanding *Mitsein* in existential thought.

Keywords: death, solitude, mitsein, Kierkegaard, existential philosophy.

The yet-unresolved problem for existential philosophy is that of thinking the Other as existing "for me," of situating the individually existing subject within the ethical relation of being-with. For if we seek to abandon an essentialist viewpoint and take existence as the starting-place of philosophy, we can only do so, it would seem, from the perspective of our own individual existence and fall necessarily into some form of solipsism. And if Sartre's affirmation that "hell is other people"[2] is certainly reductive, it points to the major problem of the existentialist rethinking of ethical relation, despite Sartre's claim that "existentialism is a humanism" and that thereby "the man who reaches himself directly through the *cogito* also discovers all other [human beings], and discovers them as the condition of his existence. He realizes that he can be nothing (in the sense that one says that one is spiritual, or that one is mean, or that one is jealous) if others do not recognize him as such."[3] Sartre's analysis evokes a major difficulty for thinking the ethical, for if recognition is certainly an important element of life in the shared social sphere, such recognition, *as determination* (one is what one is because others *see* one as such), not

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2 J.-P. Sartre: *Huis clos*, in *Théâtre complet*, Paris: Gallimard 1945 (2005), 128 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).

3 J.-P. Sartre: *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris: Gallimard 1946 (1996), 58–59 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).

only excludes true thinking of intersubjectivity, but also undermines the reality both of ethical judgment and of individual personality. Can we really admit that the individual is nothing, that there is no reality to one's ethical character independent of the evaluations and judgments given of that character through others? While Sartre would certainly admit that value judgments have merely social reality, and therefore no actuality in themselves, it would seem nevertheless that this attempt to reintroduce the ethical sphere into his existential thinking of the individual undermines his own project – for if one is determined how one is perceived, then it is questionable whether it is possible at all to construct one's identity – i. e., to maintain the idea that the individual constructs himself through the choices that he makes – and to maintain the affirmation that "existence precedes essence."[4]

The problem is not, of course, specific to Sartre's existentialism. Rather, it seems to be a recurring problem throughout all of existential thought, despite the fact that the existential paradigm should, at least theoretically, offer the surest means of arriving at a solid understanding of ethics – both in the sense of moral character and in that of the individual's responsibilities in the shared social sphere – since existential thought seeks its starting-point in the existing human perspective, which we might understand as fundamentally concerned about itself (care of the soul) and its relations to others and the world. Sartre does indeed recognize the danger of falling into solipsism implicit in the fact of identifying the relation to the other through the "modality of the exteriority of indifference,"[5] which would entail the impossibility of a subject's being affected by another, and thus that the only manifestation of the other would be *as an object*. Sartre insists, to the contrary, on the fact that the other is not merely an object, but is first and foremost "the indispensible mediator between me and myself,"[6] the one who reveals to me the very possibility of my actions and myself being seen, recognized and judged in the world. The example of shame, which Sartre offers – the feeling of shame which only appears when it is clear that one is being observed; thus, that the individual's existence and actions are situated within a shared social sphere – gives rise to the understanding of individual actions as subject to moral evaluation, awakens the individual to an understanding of his non-isolation or non-indifference to the world and the other human beings that comprise it. And Sartre suggests indeed that:

> "a positive theory of the existence of the other should be able at once to avoid solipsism and to get by without recourse to God if it were to envisage my original relation to the other as an interior negation, that is, as a negation which poses the original distinction of the other and myself to the exact

4 Sartre: *L'existentialisme*, op. cit., 26.
5 J.-P. Sartre: *L'être et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard 1943 (1998), 270 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).
6 Ibid., 260.

> extent that this relation determines me through the other and determines the other through me".[7]

Nevertheless, it would seem that Sartre fails to develop such a theory. As he writes: "the we-object is never *known*,"[8] which is to say that "[w]e are never *we* except in the eyes of others [… the] effort to salvage human totality cannot occur without positing the existence of a third party, distinct in principle from humanity."[9] And if the we-object is pure external construct, the we-subject is likewise, for Sartre, pure internal construct: "the experience of a we-subject is a pure psychological and subjective event in a singular consciousness."[10]

Beyond the difficulties inherent in thinking how the individual subject could have access to other subjectivities, and beyond that to a collective consciousness, it would seem, in addition, that existential thought seems to presuppose that otherness, or the other, fundamentally represents a danger to the individual. Sartre's radicalization (following Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel) of the Master-Slave dialectic is certainly symbolic of this danger, but beyond this radicalization existential thought seems to see the other as a source for loss of self or despair, as Kierkegaard (Anti-Climacus) puts it: "another kind of despair seems to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by 'the others.'"[11] Kierkegaard's critique is aimed, of course, not at others *qua* others, but rather as others seen in their worldliness, in their non-reflective engagements in worldly matters and social conventions. Should we however assume that to "die to the world" (*afdøe*)[12] necessarily means rejecting all understandings of ourselves as moral beings in the world, as beings for whom being-with matters? Kierkegaard's appeal to solitude seems to suggest this; it would seem that the only means by which the individual could strive to arrive at the subjective truth of existence would be through abstracting himself from the engagements with others in the world which pervert our own self-consciousness and dissuade us from the earnest task of our own spiritual upbuilding. The individual who truly seeks himself – and seeks the truth – must do so in solitude, it would seem. And Kierkegaard/Anti-Climacus suggests that:

> "On the whole, the longing for solitude is a sign that there still is spirit in a person and is the measure of what spirit there is … in the constant sociality of our day we shrink from solitude to the point (what a capital epigram!) that no use for it is known other than as punishment for criminals."[13]

A life lived in constant sociality would be a life in which the individual spiritual quest could not be fulfilled. And while Kierkegaard certainly does not mean thereby to indicate that absolute solitude and isola-

7 Ibid., 271.
8 Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, op. cit., 458.
9 Ibid., 463.
10 Ibid., 466.
11 *SKS* 11, 149 /*SUD*, 33.
12 See *The Sickness Unto Death.*
13 *SKS* 11, 178-79 / *SUD*, 64.

tion from others would be the highest good to be strived for, he suggests nevertheless that "silence is the condition for cultured conversation between man and man."[14]

Kierkegaard of course does not suggest that dying to the world, retiring to the monastery, is the end in itself; to the contrary, he suggests that dying to worldliness is necessary *in order to engage in life* in the right type of way. Such engagement is, however, certainly spiritual in Kierkegaard's thought, and the movement out of solitude, the movement into community (or at least communion with others), requires Christianity – requires the existence of a God capable of re-establishing the Christian community of the spirit and of allowing individuals to move beyond modes of interaction where they "mutually turn to each other in a frustrating and suspicious, aggressive, leveling reciprocity."[15] Only Christianity can enable the individual to escape the dangers of aggressive modes of interactions with others, only Christianity can found an understanding of being-with, since only through the asymmetry between man and God can the symmetry of human existences be posited – only through God's love, Kierkegaard affirms, do we escape the perils of objectifying relationships to others, where our own self-interest and demands for reciprocity inherent in worldly, preferential relationships, dominate; where even in love, our encounter with the other is nothing but "demand (reciprocal love is the demand) and being loved (reciprocal love) … an earthly good."[16] True being-with, requires to the contrary that we see others not as objects (either in the world, or of our demands for reciprocity), but rather as *neighbors* (*Næsten*):

> "It is in fact Christian love that discovers and knows that the neighbor exists and, what is the same thing, that everyone is the neighbor. If it were not a duty to love, the concept 'neighbor' would not exist either; but only when one loves the neighbor, only then is the selfishness in preferential love rooted out and the equality of the eternal preserved".[17]

Outside of Christianity, Kierkegaard suggests, others, and more especially the "public," represent a danger to the individual's selfhood, a danger of losing oneself in the world. If the other represents a danger to the individual, it is because the most common modes by which the individual engages with others – be they aesthetic or ethical – lead one away from oneself, and represent therefore the possibility of failing to become an agent or a person. The aesthete remains purely drawn in by the immediacy of his worldly engagements, the philosopher uniquely oriented toward the exteriority of speculative reflection, but neither realizes that true selfhood and true freedom must be an *orientation toward oneself, and toward the question one must answer*, in solitude, on one's own, *as*

14 *SKS* 8, 94 / *TA*, 99.
15 *SKS* 8, 62 / *TA*, 63.
16 *SKS* 9, 238 / *WL*, 237.
17 *SKS* 9, 51 / *WL*, 44.

a single individual.[18] The *Christian Discourses* underscore this point; as Kierkegaard writes, the true dilemma is the one which engages each of us personally, despite the fact that it seems not to be a question at all:

> "Yet you know very well that the most terrible, the most earnest question is the one of which it must be said: There is no one who is asking the question, and yet there is a question – and a question to *you personally.*"[19]

Such a question is not one which we freely ask, and may not even be one which we freely answer. For Kierkegaard, however, freedom does not, of course, mean absolute liberty of action, nor the idea that we can always choose otherwise. It may not even mean that we can choose any of our acts at all. What it is that our freedom enables us to choose is not our acts, but our selves; or, as Kierkegaard affirms already in *Either/Or*, with regard to the ethical: "The greatness is not to be this or that but to be oneself, and every human being can be this if he so wills it."[20] Such a choice is the one which must be made *alone*, the one which others cannot help us to make, the one which is radically individuating. Seen in this sense, the ethical is thus not the sphere of shared social existence, but rather very simply the act itself of self-determination. Personhood is thus essentially defined as possibility: possibility to become, openness toward what will be. Despite the tendency to see the ethical as merely a step on the way to the religious, this form of openness is perhaps a prerequisite to faith, as it places the individual before the anguishing idea that he is not ever already himself. None of our past choices, none of our present circumstances or social roles, no institution or higher being can ever replace the absolutely individuating and radically isolating act whereby we must take full responsibility for our own freedom. This is why the aesthete prefers to remain in the instantaneous, why the philosopher prefers to dwell in speculation. But the risk, as Kierkegaard points out, is that by these means we may gain the whole world, yet we will lose ourselves.

It would seem, then, that becoming a self requires that one *distance* himself from the world of others, whose engagement with the individual is always necessarily objectifying: becoming a self or a subject seems to be at odds with the notion itself of being-with. The origin of the problem seems to be situated, as Merleau-Ponty points out in an indirect critique of Heidegger, in the fact that existential philosophy remains to a large extent intellectualist, and forgets or rejects an understanding of the individual person as an incarnated being. As Merleau-Ponty affirms:

> "We do not blame reflexive philosophy merely for having transformed the world into a poem, but also for having disfigured the being of the

18 Recognizing, of course, that Kierkegaard does posit that the choice that one finally makes is not itself indifferent, and that the individual who chooses rightly will ultimately choose the Good – i. e., the Christian.

19 *SKS* 10, 243 / *CD*, 236.

20 *SKS* 3, 173 / *EO2*, 177.

thinking 'subject,' understanding it as 'thought,' –and, finally, rendering its relations with other 'subjects' in their shared world unthinkable."[21]

In order to dissociate subject and thought, to think subjectivity as other than pure intellectuality, Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of "flesh" in his unfinished manuscript *The visible and the invisible*. Such an understanding allows for the construction of an understanding of the subject which is fundamentally engaged in the sphere of intersubjective relations, where the solitude or alienation of the objectified/isolated individual proves to be a purely theoretical concept. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, it is essential to understand that "what I am all in all goes beyond what I am for myself, my universality of nothingness is only presumption on my part."[22] As such, it is essential to understand that while "there is no positive experience of the other … there is an experience of my total being as involved in the visible part of myself."[23] But if the *visibility* of our internal existences necessarily leads down to the solitude, if not the solipsism, of isolated selfhood, understanding the individual as a "locus of experiences" (*champ d'expériences*)[24] opens up to a way of understanding the world and others as *presence* in which the distinctions between self and other become purely abstract, and in which "the self and the non-self are like the two sides [of being], and that, perhaps, our experience *is* this reversal which situates us far from the 'we,' in the other, in things."[25]

The question, then, is how we can best arrive at an understanding of the subject or the self as "flesh," how one might best understand the problem of subjectivity outside of or beyond the domain of visibility and thought. And we would suggest that that the best way for rethinking the existential standpoint on subjectivity and its place in the ethical sphere must pass through limit-experiences such as death. As Heidegger points out, the *Sein-zum-Tode* is the limit of being, a form of quotidian but also ultimate alienation with which we are all ultimately confronted. As such, death reveals us to ourselves in our authenticity, but also requires us to rethink the status of being-for and being-with. However, by thinking the *Sein-zum-Tode* from an individual perspective, Heidegger only manages to briefly sketch out a theory of *Mitsein*, without being able to demonstrate how being-with could be anything more than a purely theoretical construction.

Would not the problem, then, be the fact that philosophy itself, as a whole, seems unable to understand death as an experience – since, as an experience which either *is not* experience as such or as the very limit of experience, death does not offer any possibility for conceptualization? While Hegel sees death and negativity as that which links the individual to the universal, the finite to the infinite, and thereby renders

21 M. Merleau-Ponty: *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, 66 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).
22 Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., 86–87.
23 Ibid., 87.
24 Ibid., 147.
25 Ibid., 210.

it possible to speak of being, he simultaneously understands it as an absolute rift.[26] In response to Hegel, we might ask whether the negativity of death really ought to be conceptualized, whether we ought not to see that death is itself integrated into life, into lived experience – certainly, as the limit of our experience, or as a limit-experience. For death is not simply a thought experience, part of the life of spirit; it is to the contrary integrated into the ontological structure of life, and is present before our attempts to examine it. And we would suggest as well that if Heidegger seeks to rethink the ontological structure of death, making it into a "phenomenon of life,"[27] and suggesting that being-towards-death is the most individuating and authentic experience of our existence, since "[n]o one can take the Other's dying away from him,"[28] it becomes, however, necessary to take the reflection one step further than Heidegger does – as his analysis finally disincarnates even death itself, making it into a mere step on the path of being-towards. Despite his insistence on the fact that the death of others affects us, because we do share a world with them and their simple demise does not constitute an end to this shared experience, Heidegger's understanding of death reveals itself to be finally non-relational – since death is precisely, in his terms, that through which individualization and totalization of the Dasein become possible. Death is thus, for Heidegger, the ultimate possibility which each Dasein must face *on its own*; as he writes: "death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped.*"[29]

The difficulty, of course, is the fact that death, and more especially one's own death, not only is not an event for the individual, as Heidegger points out, but more importantly is precisely the limit beyond which thinking the individual in terms other than those of dualism (mind and matter, infinite and finite, spirit and body) seems impossible. Death is the point where the individual ceases to be a "subject" – at least, if we accept the general understanding of subjectivity. Yet we might suggest that this is because we have too often sought to think subjectivity itself from a subjectivist standpoint. And if we assume that a person's own death is indeed a moment of rupture – after which the person is no longer a thinking, reflective being, capable of desiring, willing, projecting, remembering – we might wonder whether it is simultaneously a moment of rupture in the *intersubjective sphere*. Do we really stop seeing the other lying dead before us as a subject, as a person who perhaps no longer desires and wills but who at the very least had desired and willed, and whose past desires and volition, whose former lived existence, still have a hold on us – a moral duty, might we say, an appeal to our humanity, and an appeal to us as individuals? The lifeless body before us

[26] See GWF Hegel: Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. Yirmiyahu Yovel, Princeton: Princeton UP 2005, 128–129.
[27] M. Heidegger: *Being and Time*, transl. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Maiden: Blackwell 2007, 290.
[28] Ibid., 284.
[29] Ibid., 294.

does not suddenly become just another object in the world[30] – or those who observe it, it is just as much a person as it had been the moment before. And the lifeless body poses a problem both for ontology and for ethics: if for a given individual, one's own death marks a separation between being and non-being, this separation is valid merely in terms of those qualifications that can be ascribed to being (being *alive*, being *a thinking subj*ect…), but not definitively – for being dead is still *being*, the dead body is *still present* and existing: being dead is not yet non-being, despite the fact that Kierkegaard and Heidegger both point to the idea that death is an end to the individual's living, breathing and conscious presence. And this ontological difficulty underscores a fundamental problem for and understanding of *being-with*, as well: the dead who still *are*, and who still *are present*, still engage us in relations of moral reciprocity and duty, still solicit us in many respects – and not merely, as one might suggest, because they hint at our own mortality and our own ultimate end and fate. Heidegger does admit, of course, that though the dead are no longer *with* us, in the sense of still-being in our community of the living, we nevertheless remain with them to some extent through our continued shared remembrances. We would suggest, however, that this is only a superficial understanding of our relation to death and to the dead; if we do have duties to the dead, it is not merely because in some sense they are still-present to us, but rather because their past existence as members of our shared world implies a continued, continuing engagement.

We may note that while Heidegger affirms that *Sein-zum-Tode* reveals the individual's ownmost potential, and is perhaps the only experience whereby one becomes fully conscious of one's being-there in the isolation of unshareable experience, Freud suggests to the contrary that it is not our own death that marks us the most, but rather that of others, of those who are near to us. Not only does the death of others mark us, Freud affirms—it also reveals our authenticity and our ethical duties:

> "What came into existence beside the dead body of the loved one was not only the doctrine of the soul, the belief in immortality and a powerful source of man's sense of guilt, but also the earliest ethical commandments."[31]

In other words, the encounter with death is the origin of the duty not to kill, which Freud sees as the first ethical commandment. In his reflections on man's understanding of death in modernity, Freud remarks a fundamental discord between the ways in which we speak about death (as necessary ultimate end), and the reality of our engagements with

[30] To be fair, Heidegger does note that: "This something which is just-present-at-hand-and-no-more is 'more' than a *lifeless* material Thing. In it we encounter something *unalive*, which has lost its life." (Ibid., 282, § 47). ("Das Nur-noch-Vorhandene ist ‚mehr' als ein lebloses materielles Ding. Mit ihm begegnet ein des Lebens verlustig gegangenes Unlebendiges" (p. 238).)

[31] S. Freud: Thoughts on war and death, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. J. Strachey et al., Vol XIV, London: The Hogarth Press 1991, 295.

death, which we seek to eliminate from our lives and thought. Despite this, however, Freud insists on the fact that while our own death is something in which we cannot really, truly, believe, the deaths of those near to us reveal that death *acts on our lives*, on life itself: the way in which we relate to the death of others determines the ways in which we relate to ourselves, to others and to the world. In order for this to be the case, however, death has to be seen not as an abstract possibility, neither as an event occurring to some unknown individual, but rather within the concrete context of human relationships. It is the deaths of those that matter to us which enable us to develop some understanding notion of *Mitsein.* And it should be noted that this is true not because the death of others reveal our own mortality, but rather because the death of others is that which affects us the most and reveals the importance of shared experience and intersubjectivity in the constitution of ourselves as selves. Contrary to the inherent subjectivism of the Heideggerian *Sein-zum-Tode*, the death of others reveals to us that we exist as singular and authentic beings *only* within the context of a shared world, and *only* insofar as others exist and matter to us.

Freud thus seeks the origin of moral sentiment, of other-consciousness, outside of rationality, but inherently enrooted in shared intersubjective experience. In this sense, he seems to take up the positions elaborated by Schopenhauer on ethics, an ethics rooted not in rationality or understanding, but rather in the notions of harmony and sympathy naturally existing between living beings. In his chapter "On Ethics" in the *Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer effectively affirms that a true morality can have no other basis than sympathy:

> "If one only observes [another's] suffering, his need, his anxiety, his pain – then we always feel related to him, we sympathize with him – and rather than hatred or contempt, we feel compassion for him, which is the only *agape* (love)."[32]

Need, anxiety, pain, suffering: these are, according to Schopenhauer, moments which can open us up to the other, enable us to move beyond our individual perspectives. And insofar as need, pain and anxiety are at once individual and thereby unshareable experiences, but also experiences which are common to all men, they not only *can* be understood as experiences, but can also open us up to an understanding of the Other. If illness, misery and death are determining/determinate conditions of our lived existence, they do not necessarily entail an absolute determinism or isolation within our individual selves. Schopenhauer is often taxed with extreme pessimism in his thinking of the human condition, of course; but we might suggest that this critique is quite unjustified – if Schopenhauer does see material, physical existence as a state of suffering, he also remarks that: "[The idea] that the world only has physical, and not moral, signification, is the greatest, the most pernicious, the fundamental error,

32 A. Schopenhauer: *Parerga und Paralipomena II*, *Sämtliche Werke*, B. V, Suhrkamp 1986, 240 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).

the true perversity of the mind."[33] What suffering, death, and alienation should enable us to understand is that we exist within a moral world, a shared sphere which gives meaning to our existence – not, as Sartre will later affirm, in the sense that it is the value-judgments of others that make us what we are, but rather in the sense that the very fact that our experiences are *not* absolutely unique and singular proves that there is something *more than* our existence as singular individuals: that there is a reality to the notion of community, a reality that is not merely a fictitious social construct, but which is intrinsic to the nature of life itself.

What Schopenhauer, Freud, and others bring to the forefront, is essentially that the foundation of ethics or of *being-with* are of course dependent upon our ability to see or perceive others – and yet, at the same time, that the concept of recognition, in its traditional sense, often comes down to *not seeing*: not seeing the other in his otherness. Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point in his critique of traditional philosophical models; as he remarks:

> "For a philosophy which situates itself in pure vision, quick overview, there can be no encounter with others – since the glance dominates, it can only dominate things, and if it falls on men, it transforms them into dummies moved only by springs."[34]

Visibility cannot, Merleau-Ponty suggests, be assimilated purely with vision – seeing requires a more comprehensive model of understanding the individual as an embodied being, within a shared intersubjective space. And we might suggest precisely that though suffering, death and alienation often situate the individual within the limits of his singular experience, it is precisely for this reason that they offer us a means of opening up to a new understanding of personhood – as limit-experiences, they oblige us to rethink our understanding of the notion of subject itself.

Levinas makes a similar argument, in his understanding of the face (*le visage*) as that which immediately implies the ethical relation of being-with. For Levinas, seeing the face of the Other is an immediate act of perception of the other in his otherness – otherness which becomes however communication or communicability, positioning of the individual within the sphere of shared existence. Yet Levinas's analysis also falls under the critique offered of Heidegger and existential philosophy in general – if Levinas insists on the possibility of immediate perception of otherness, he nevertheless suggests that language offers the only possibility of moving beyond our individual enrootedness in our subjective positions. What ought we to make, then, of situations in which communication through language acts becomes impossible? What happens when we are confronted with death, alienation and pain – experiences which render us incapable of speaking? As interesting as Levinas's rethinking of ethics may be, the problem they pose is that of what to

33 Ibid., 238.

34 M. Merleau-Ponty: *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, 107 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).

make of situations when experiences of immediate perception fail; in other words, Levinas is unable to think "beyond the face" (*au-delà du visage*).[35] For Levinas presupposes that our ability to perceive others and to thereby be projected into the ethical sphere depend on the fact that we, as individuals, are already self-sufficient, developed subjects. When Levinas describes the "*au-delà de l'éthique*," he only does so, however, in terms of the erotic – which is, as he remarks:

> "Neither knowledge, nor power. In sensual delight, the other – the feminine – withdraws back into its mystery. The relation to him is a relation to an absence."[36]

It would seem, then, that beyond the face, there is nothing – only the absence of relation given through desire and sensual delight – or as Heidegger affirms, the individual's "ownmost possibility is *non-relational.*"[37] Delight or death – the contrast is striking, and the distance separating Levinas from Heidegger radical, and yet in both cases, it would seem that extreme experiences necessarily lead back to the radical isolation of the individual, the impossibility of thinking being-with as other than a mere accessory, an inessential addition to the necessarily singular nature of authentic subjectivity.

We would suggest, then, that a return to Kierkegaard might enable us to move beyond this contradiction, and to rethink the role of ethics in a more satisfactory manner. This may seem surprising, as Kierkegaard himself is often cited as the thinker of radical subjectivity, of the Individual (*den Enkelte*), and even more so since Heidegger's reflections on death are largely inspired by Kierkegaard's works. However, we may note that there is a major difference in the way in which Kierkegaard and Heidegger get at the topic. Indeed, Heidegger makes a reverse move from that offered in Kierkegaard's works – whereas Kierkegaard *begins*, in his writings on death and the relation to the dead, with a portrayal of singularity to move *toward* a notion of communion with others,[38] Heidegger, in his thinking of death, begins with the collective to move toward the singular. The result is that Heidegger closes the door to an understanding of *Mitsein*; being-with appears only to have value in our pre-singularized, if not anonymous, worldly engagements – it is something to be moved beyond if we are to strive toward authentic existence. Kierkegaard's works, and particularly his reflections on death and on our relations to the dead, offer a radically different way of understanding "authentic" subjectivity. While singular individuality is certainly important, a move beyond our pre-subjective pure engagement in worldly mat-

35 Title of section IV of *Totalité et infini.*
36 E. Levinas: *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, Paris: Kluwer Academic 2008, 309 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).
37 Heidegger, op. cit., 308.
38 This is particularly apparent in relation to Kierkegaard's two main analyses of death: on the one hand, the Graveside discourse (1845), on the other, the penultimate discourse in *Works of Love*, "The Work of Love in recollecting One Who is Dead" (1847).

ters, Kierkegaard's Christian perspective incites him to make a further move, and to think personhood in terms of the individual's engagement *with others in the world*. For Kierkegaard, it is of course a communion of spirit, more than a worldly community of human individuals. And yet, this communion of spirit is determinate in the individual's reappropriation of proper modes of engagement in the world. Such engagement enables us to rethink the ethical stance, and the theories of value themselves that enable us to engage with others. As Kierkegaard writes in the *Christian Discourses*:

> "Thus the goods of the spirit are in themselves essentially communication; their acquirement, their possession, in itself a benefaction to all. … This is the humanity of spiritual goods in contrast to the inhumanity of earthly goods. What is humanity [*Menneskelighed*]? Human likeness [*menneskelige Lighed*] or equality [*Ligelighed*]. Even at the moment when he most seems to be working for himself in acquiring these goods, he is communicating; it lies in the very essence of the goods, their possession is communication."[39]

As opposed to mere worldly goods, the goods of spirit are those that found the possibility of being-with others, and found our ethical relations to others though the recognition of the ideals of humanity and equality.

How, then, does death or alienation enable us to arrive at such a notion of being-with? While Kierkegaard's first discourse on death, "At a Graveside," insists on the fact that the confrontation with death leads us to a higher understanding of ourselves – "Death can expressly teach that the earnestness lies in the inner being, in thought, can teach that it is only an illusion when the external is regarded light-mindedly or heavy-mindedly or when the observer, profoundly considering the thought of death, forgets to think about and take into *his own death*"[40] – the point of view he elaborates in *Works of Love* demonstrates to the contrary that it is through the act of recollecting, by "go[ing] to the dead once again, in order *there* to take an aim at life" that one may come to an understanding not merely of oneself and one's inner being, but also of life itself.[41] What is to be learned through such an excursion? Kierkegaard's response is precisely that the dead teach us something about human nature and human kinship:

> "If you are dizzy from continually looking at and hearing about life's dissimilarities – among 'the kin of clay' there is no distinction, but only the close kinship. That all human beings are blood relatives, that is, of one blood, this kinship of life is so often disavowed in life; but that they are of one clay, this kinship of death, this cannot be disavowed."[42]

What the dead reveal is finally the equality of our human condition, that despite the facticity (biological or social) which differentiates us in

39 *SKS* 10, 128 / *CD*, 117.
40 *SKS* 5, 444 / *TDIO*, 73 (our emphasis).
41 *SKS* 9, 339 /*WL*, 345.
42 *SKS* 9, 339 /*WL*, 345.

life from others, all of these differences (being rich or poor, healthy or sickly) all come down to nothing; that the end is the same for all, that our final resting place is the same, that the particularities which distinguish us in our worldly existences, and to which we attribute so much import in our everyday lives, are merely futile and passing attributes.

Death, then, seems to found the possibility for ethical relation, for an understanding of human kinship fundamental to engaging with others in the right type of way. For though Heidegger certainly takes up Kierkegaard's reflections when analyzing how death *discloses* individuality, reveals the Dasein to itself in its ownmost possibilities and authenticity, Heidegger neglects the fact that when Kierkegaard insists on the fact that, when recollecting the dead, it is "the one who is living [who is] disclosed,"[43] the way *in which* the living one is disclosed is *not* to himself, but rather to those observing him who are able to determine thereby the quality of his modes or relating to others.[44] Relating to the dead reveals us not merely as singular individuals, but first and foremost as individuals engaged in the sphere of collective engagements and duties. "We certainly do have duties also to the dead," Kierkegaard writes.[45] These duties are not higher, of course, than our duties toward the living – Kierkegaard insists on the fact that "it is our duty to love the people we do not see but also those we do see"[46] – nevertheless, their disclosure is perhaps more fundamental, since only in relating to the dead, in assuming our duties to the dead, can we arrive at the certainty that our engagements are disinterested. Only in relating to the dead, who cannot reciprocate, cannot answer back or give us guidance, can we be certain that our actions are not merely selfish demands for repayment that we do not act out of our own self-interest, as we often do in worldly interactions. Only in relating to the dead can we be sure that we are, first and foremost, intersubjective beings for whom *being-with* matters, and matters absolutely. And as such, Kierkegaard suggests that contrary to the *earnestness* of death which teaches us to know our own singularities, to see ourselves as isolated individuals – which he describes in "At a Graveside" – there is a higher form of earnestness, which resides not in death itself, but rather in our ways of relating to the dead, in our love for those who are deceased (as well as for the living). As he writes in *Works of Love*:

> "Death is not earnest in the same way as the eternal is. To the earnestness of death belong that remarkable capacity for awakening, this resonance of a profound mockery that, detached from the thought of the eternal, is an empty, often brazen jest, but together with the thought of the eternal is just what it should be and is utterly different from the insipid earnestness that least of all captures and holds a thought that has the tension the thought of death has."[47]

43 *SKS* 9, 341 /*WL*, 347.
44 *SKS* 9, 341 /*WL*, 347.
45 *SKS* 9, 341 /*WL*, 347.
46 *SKS* 9, 351 / *WL*, 358.
47 *SKS* 9, 346-347 / *WL*, 353.

Death's earnestness is indeed, as the Graveside discourse attests, the knowledge that we are: "Alone because that is indeed what death makes [us] when the grave is closed."[48] Yet there is something higher than this knowledge of our solitude or aloneness, there is something higher than the earnestness of death – and that is the earnestness which stems from the knowledge that we *are not alone*, that we are not isolated existences thrown blindly into the world and forced thereafter to struggle toward death for our own authenticity (Heidegger) or to our deaths for recognition (Sartre).

If death, or alienation, are thus able to open us up to intersubjective experiences, to a notion of being-with, it is important to note that these are however not important so much in themselves, as they are relevant to what they reveal about those who understand them in the right type of way. As Kierkegaard notes, what death reveals is finally none other than love – the ways in which one (who is living) relates to those who are dead reveal the capacity for love that resides in the person. Gabriel Marcel makes a similar point, linking love to death: "To love someone is to say: you will not die."[49] For Marcel, love is that act whereby one refuses to recognize, or perhaps becomes incapable of recognizing, death's annihilating power. And in that sense, death is not the revelation of individuality or of singularity, the manifestation of the Dasein's ownmost potential, as Heidegger suggests, but rather that which founds an understanding of being-with as a promise for eternity. And such promise is not merely oneiric wish: it is, first and foremost, the opening up of the notion of subjectivity –openness to new ways of seeing others as counting absolutely within the sphere of shared existence.

Beyond solitude, then, there is love – beyond solitude, there is togetherness. And for Kierkegaard, togetherness and being-with are necessary for one to engage in existence in the right type of way, since only togetherness and kinship can help us understand that human existence, for all its difficulties, is not merely a trial we must withstand, a source of pain and suffering, but is also, first and foremost, the possibility of joyous investment in the world. Those who live in solitude, or those persons who merely seek the companionship of the suffering, like the "Συμπαρανεκρώμενοι" community,[50] may see solitude as the highest good, since solitude appears at least to be more hidden, more interior, more difficult to attain than joy. As Kierkegaard/"A" writes in the first book of *Either/Or*, "Joy is communicative, sociable, open, wishes to express itself. Sorrow is inclosingly reserved [*indesluttet*], silent, solitary, and seeks to return into itself."[51] Yet the privilege that the community of those who wish to die award to solitude remains ambiguous, since while there is certainly truth to the fact that solitude, isolation and death

48 *SKS* 5, 458 / *TDIO*, 89.
49 G. Marcel: *Le mystère de l'être: Foi et réalité*, vol. 2, Paris: Aubier 1981, 154–155 (translation – M. Fox-Muraton).
50 See *SKS* 2, 137ff / *EO1*, 137 ff.
51 *SKS* 2, 167 / *EO1*, 169.

reveal one to oneself, disclose one's interiority or innermost being, they can only do so at a loss; as the aesthete acknowledges:

> "If the individual is isolated [*Er Individet isoleret*], then either he is absolutely the creator of his own fate, and then there is nothing tragic anymore, but only evil … or the individuals are merely modifications of the eternal substance of life, and so once again the tragic is lost."[52]

Beyond solitude, however, there is communion – beyond solitude, there is communication. And if solitude may then be a necessary step on the path to kinship and communication, Kierkegaard insists on the fact that it is merely a step. For contrary to the affirmation made in *Either/Or* that joy is immediately disclosed whereas sorrow hides from observation, in the discourse "The Lily of the Field and the Bird in the Air" Kierkegaard suggests that becoming joyous is a task, requires learning, and is thus not immediate, but rather that which needs to be strived for. Becoming joyous must be learned through observation – through observation of others, through observation of the lily or the bird, who can teach us "what it is to be a human being and what religiously is the requirement for being a human being."[53] Yet such lessons are obviously not ones that can simply be transmitted and indoctrinated – to the contrary, Kierkegaard insists on the fact that no truth about what is essentially human can be taught or transferred from one generation to another; as he/de Silentio notes in *Fear and Trembling* – "Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns the essentially human from a previous one."[54] No one can learn from another, no one can learn the essentially human from past generations, no useful textbooks can be written that can instruct us on how we ought to act, that can teach us "the essentially human [which] is passion."[55] And yet we do learn, to learn is indeed our highest task. And moreover we learn from others. What we learn is however not learnt "all at once," but is rather that which we can only learn "little by little," again and again, the task of our lives' efforts.[56] And what we learn by observing – what it is to be human – Kierkegaard defines through three essential modes of relating (to oneself, to the truth, to the world, to facticity, to God): "silence, obedience, [and] joy!"[57]

Silence, obedience, joy – what it is to be a human being is to be engaged upon a path, a path leading to understanding, and which can only arrive at full comprehension if one accepts to follow it according to its own inherent structure. For there can be no coming into existence, Kierkegaard suggests, if one does not first take the necessary step of forgetting oneself, becoming as nothing, dying to the world, so that one might afterward learn to obediently submit to the facticity of existence and (in

52 *SKS* 2, 158–159 / *EO1*, 160. (Danish added.)
53 *SKS* 11,10 / *WA*, 3.
54 *SKS* 4, 208 / *FT*, 121.
55 Ibid.
56 *SKS* 11, 10 / *WA*, 3.
57 Ibid.

the Christian sense) the duty toward God, which is the freeing servitude whereby we can begin anew, joyously engage in a world where our senses are engaged in the pure presence of the present. In other words, it is only by dying to the world, to our first immediacy (of the aesthetic-ethical spheres) that a new immediacy of inwardness or interiority becomes possible, where "you" fully understands: "that you came into existence, that you exist, that *today* you receive what is necessary for life; that you came into existence, that you became a human being; that you can see, bear in mind that you can see, that you can hear, that you can smell, that you can taste, that you can feel."[58] Yet such an immediacy of inwardness, for Kierkegaard, is not solitude. Rather, it is the joy which stems from the understanding that we are not alone in the world, that we exist before God *and* before others, that we do have duties to others – those we do not see, but also those we do see – and that our engagement in the world, with others, is the highest good of human existence. Solitude, isolation, or confrontation with death may, then, lead to authentic selfhood, but they cannot lead to *authentic existence*. For such authentic existence is only possible, Kierkegaard suggests, because we do exist in a world with others, because we can engage joyously in our lives, because the presence of the present is shared experience. Should we neglect this primordial fact, we would indeed be condemned to solipsism. Yet Kierkegaard encourages us not to look inward for meaning, but rather to look outward. He encourages us not to look vaguely at the nothingness that apparently surrounds us, as Frater Taciturnus describes the act of vain soul-searching.[59] As opposed to this move of thinking's redoubling upon itself, which is indeed the meaninglessness or triviality of the contemplation of nothingness, Kierkegaard encourages us to the contrary to become as nothing so that our sight may move away from ourselves and toward God, toward communion and kinship, toward the world. What is to be discovered, if we are able to do so, is the richness of a world filled with the works of love, the joys of existence, the communicative possibilities, and the promises of the present, which are there for us, which are disclosed in the sphere of shared existence, and which are visible, if only we first understand that we are not alone in the world.

58 *SKS* 11, 10 / *WA*, 3.
59 See *SKS* 6, 331/ *SLW*, 356–357.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY OR INTEREXISTENTIALITY? KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPTION OF EXISTENTIAL COMMUNICATION

Velga Vevere[1]

Abstract

To speak about conception of communication in Kierkegaard's authorship seems a bit challenging task since, strictly speaking, the problem has been tackled exclusively only in his unpublished lectures on the dialectics of ethical and ethical-religious communication and in a few journal entries. Sill, in my opinion, the theme of communication runs through Kierkegaard's works though quite often in unconventional setting; to be more precise, communication is being viewed as sharing of information where the crucial role is assigned to the process itself (communication of ability vs. communication of knowledge); at the same time „since the communication is oriented toward existence is pathos-filled in inward deepening."[2] Thus Kierkegaard introduces the concept of existence-communication that by no means explanatory, but rather it is paradoxical in its nature. "Christianity's being an existence-communication that makes existing paradoxical, which is why it remains the paradox as long as there is existing and only eternity has the explanation."[3] The aim of the present paper is to disclose the specific character of Kierkegaard's conception of communication that requires, first of all, the act of isolation, then turning towards oneself and only after that – reaching for others, thus performing the double movement of communication. The article consists of five subsequent parts: The Single One; the Other; Distance and Proximity; The Neighbor; and Double Movement of Communication.

Keywords: communication, individual, neighbor, double movement of communication.

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2 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, 559.

3 Ibid., 562.

The Single One

I would like to start the discussion on the Kierkegaard's conception of communication with the famous passage from his *The Sickness unto Death*:

> "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. In the relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus under the qualification of the psychical the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation. If, however, the relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self."[4]

In this quotation I would like to stress the aspect of relation, of the self-relating to oneself and through this relation relating to others (the absolute precondition is first to establish this relation to oneself or "othering"). This brings into question of the quality of relation to others as, it seems, and in this case the other is playing only the secondary or supporting role. Is it so? I believe that not since the category of the Single One is decisive in understanding Kierkegaard's conception of such relation – precisely because I as an individual am potentially able to get hold of myself, my relation to others is on the deeper level; at the same time others as individuals are turning towards me in the same way through first their self-recognition and then through recognition of me. If nothing else, this can create the common ground for mutual understanding of not understanding each other in full depth. Still the question is – how can we be together in our inescapable singularity?

Martin Buber approaches this matter, constantly referring to Kierkegaard's notion of the single one in his essay *The question to the single one* (*Die Frage an den Einzelnen*).[5] The title of the essay is quite telling as it emphasizes not the notion of the singularity, but rather problems that can arise together with that as for him the true existence is possible only in the dialogical *I – Thou* relation, whereas in Kierkegaard he sees the praise of solitariness, or, in short the *I – I* relation. He writes:

> "All individualism, whether it is styled aesthetic, ethical or religious, has a cheap and ready pleasure in man provided he is 'developing'. In other words, 'ethical' and 'religious' individualism are only inflections of the 'aes-

4 S. Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 13.

5 M. Buber: The Question to the Single One, in: *Between Man and Man*, London and Glasgow: Collins Clear-Type Press 1964, 60–108.

thetic' (which is as little genuine *aesthesis* as those are genuine *ethos* and genuine *religio*)."[6]

What can we see here? First, the single one means not the specific subject or a man, but rather – a person finding himself. Secondly, although Kierkegaard's category it exclusively religious (according to Buber) his religiousness at some point turns merely into the shadow play.

> "He cannot mean that to become a Single One is the presupposition of a condition of the soul, called religiosity. It is not a matter of a condition of the soul but a matter of existence in that strict sense in which – precisely by fulfilling the personal life – it steps in its essence over the boundary of the person. Then being, familiar being, becomes unfamiliar and no longer signifies my being, but my participation in the Present Being."[7]

Communication of truth for the Single One is quite an endeavor since to be the Single One is to communicate the truth. But what is this truth? It is the truth of the Single One existing; thus the main determinant of the Single One consists of him communicating his own existence as the ultimate truth. By communication he enters a special relation with himself.

> "This relation is an exclusive one, and this means, according to Kierkegaard, that is the excluding relation, excluding all others; more precisely, that it is the relation which in virtue of its unique, essential life expels all other relations into the realm of unessential."[8]

How is then the individual's relation with others, the public possible? According to Kierkegaard – by turning the crowd into the Single Ones; still the Single Ones remain singles barely touching each other in a significant way (one of examples Buber mentions is Kierkegaard's renunciation of marriage, refusal to engage in the body politics). But perhaps the decisive factor is that principal recognition of the singularity of others can create some level of tolerance bar and save them from the realm of unessential. Nevertheless, for Buber it is not enough, of course, he favors the concept of the Single One, but for him:

> "The Single One is the man for whom the reality of relation with God as an exclusive relation includes and encompasses the possibility of relation with all otherness, and for whom the whole body politic, the reservoir of otherness, offers just enough otherness for him to pass his life with it."[9]

As we see Buber takes quite a critical stance, interpreting Kierkegaard's position as a kind of isolation, self-encapsulation that precludes all ties with others, in other words – any possibility of intersubjectivity. Whereas, in my opinion, in Kierkegaard, there is a potential for *We* relationships, therefore, we need to clarify his own conception of the

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6 Ibid., 64.
7 Buber, op. cit., 62–63.
8 Ibid., 71.
9 Ibid., 88.

individual and his other – the crowd. The theme has been thoroughly explicated in his "Literary review"[10] and in the two notes on individual (in a companion piece to "My work as an author").[11] The category of the Single One (the Individual) for Kierkegaard is the highest stage of individualization, the so-called second immediacy (coming after the first aesthetic immediacy and reflection). Besides that this category serves as the diagnostic tool to detect sicknesses of the age of modernity. Moreover, according to him, the age itself is sick, the symptoms being manifest in all spheres of human existence – technology, science, social relations, politics, philosophy and religious life. In his opinion, the worst of the worst is the phenomenon of leveling brought about the modern condition that results in the drowning in the *pre-o-portier* (ready for use) intellectualism. In the *Literary Review* he characterizes the present age as some kind of negative sociality based on abstract principles and loss of individuality that leads to the forgetfulness of existence.

> "The dialectics of the present age points to the impartiality, and it is most consistent if mistaken implementation is levelling, as the negative unity of the negative mutuality of the individuals."[12]

The negativity of relation is related to the generalizing view that requires anonymity as the person's name and position is of no importance for the society in general.

> "The abstraction of levelling, this spontaneous combustion of the human race produced by the friction arising when the individual, singling out inwardly in religiousness, fails to materialize, will be 'constant', as they say of a trade-wind; this abstraction consumes everything, but by means of it every individual, each for himself, may again be educated religiously, helped in highest sense in the *examen rigorosum* of levelling to gain the essentiality of religious in himself."[13]

But what about the role of the individual? "In its immediate and beautiful formation, the individuality principle in the guise of the man of excellence, the man of rank, is a preliminary form of the generation, and it has the subordinate individuals form themselves in groups around the representative."[14] How then is communication between individuals possible?

In *Two notes on the individual*, in the first note he dwells on the relationship between the individual and the public (here he calls it in a depreciatory manner "the crowd"); particularly accentuating the phenomenon of the collective responsibility that in reality turns out to be the lack of individual responsibility. The defining characteristic of the

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10 S. Kierkegaard: *A Literary Review*, London: Penguin Books 2001.

11 S. Kierkegaard: 'The Individual': Two Notes Concerning my Work as an Author, in: *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1962, 107–138.

12 Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, op. cit., 75.

13 Ibid., 78.

14 Ibid., 79.

Individual in Kierkegaard, in my opinion, is as follows: "The Individual is the category of spirit, of the spiritual awakening; a thing as opposite to as well could be thought of."[15] This conception of the individual is the ethical one related to the paradoxical notion of religiosity.

> "But this category cannot be delivered in a lecture; it is a specific ability, an art, an ethical task, and it is an art the practice of which might in his time have cost the practitioner his life."[16]

And if we perceive it as an ethical ideal to strive for, as movement towards the authenticity of the self, then individualization doesn't mean the radical seclusion of each and every individual, but rather it opens up the possibility of true communication between equal partners.

The Other

In the article devoted to Søren Kierkegaard's conception and representation of existence *Existence and Ethics*[17] Emmanuel Levinas takes quite a critical stance saying that his understanding of subjectivity could be viewed "...as something separate but located on this side of objective Being rather than beyond that."[18] What does this revelation mean? According to Levinas, Kierkegaard could be still placed within the tradition of rationality that starts with Socrates, and in this sense Kierkegaardian conception of subjectivity in no way resists the Hegelian system and its totalizing force. For Levinas, the gap between the Self and the Other though unbridgeable (as determined by the absolute transcendence of the Other) could be made meaningful by the initial welcoming of the Other and conversation. At the same time Kierkegaard insists upon the major significance of distancing and of silence as the basis of existential communication per se, therefore he speaks about special measures to be taken to this necessary alienation of the Self from the Other (and of the Self from itself accordingly). In other words, what is meaningless for Levinas becomes meaningful for Kierkegaard and vice versa. This could be illustrated by Levinas's remark:

> "And then, with Kierkegaard, it becomes possible for something to manifest itself in such a way as to leave us wondering whether the manifestation really took place. Someone starts to speak, but no – nothing has been said. Truth is played out in two phases: the essential truth is given expression, but at the same time nothing has been said. This is the new philosophical situation: a result which is not a result, and permanent distress. First revelation, then nothing."[19]

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15 Kierkegaard, *'The Individual'*, op. cit., 132.
16 Kierkegaard, *'The Individual'*, op. cit., 135.
17 E. Levinas: Existence and Ethics, in: *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1998, 26–38.
18 Ibid., 26.
19 Ibid., 36.

The other point of criticism by Levinas is Kierkegaard's subjectivity's tension over itself that ends up in the philosophy of egoism.

> "This kind of existence, whose inwardness exceed exteriority and cannot be contained by it, thus participate sin the violence of the modern world, with its cult of Passion and Fury. It brings irresponsibility in its wake and ferment of disintegration."[20]

For Kierkegaard, in contrary, the very moment the subject chooses himself, turns to itself, it becomes able to take up a full responsibility for this choice, and only after that a movement towards the Other is being made possible. Here we should remember the fore mentioned Kierkegaard's description of the Self as relation. The relation of the Self to the own self is the one that brings in the otherness within the Self itself.

One of the most distinctive features of Kierkegaard's theory of existential communication is its anti-hermeneutical character. In what sense? Kierkegaard's vision of dialogue presupposes a distance, avoidance of identification with the opponent and by all means avoidance of empathy. It means, first of all, the sovereignty of the subject. Levinas in his critique of Kierkegaard calls this position the egoism precluding any true communication, as the subject in this case occupies a privileged position comparing to the Other.[21] Kierkegaard would agree with Levinas that distance is the matter of prime importance for him, but their understanding of the very nature of the distance and the reasons for this particular distancing differ drastically. None of them speak of the closure of the gap. For Levinas the radical distance is retained in the questioning gaze – the Other is never being reduced to the Same.

> "The transcendence with which the metaphysician designates it is distinctive in that the distance it expresses, unlike all distances, enters into the *way of existing* of the exterior being. Its formal characteristic, to be the other, makes up its content. Thus the metaphysician and the other cannot be *totalized*. The metaphysician is absolutely separate."[22]

The metaphysician and the Other does not form a simple correlation that could be reversed under circumstances, and this radical break means simply that it is impossible to place oneself outside this correlation. If this wouldn't be so then the Same and the Other could be included in one and the same gaze, and the absolute distance would be closed; and, this, in turn, would mean the act of violence to be performed regarding the sovereignty of the Other (this is one of the ac-

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20 Levinas, op. cit., 30.

21 Another example of Kierkegaard's treatment of the problem of distance is his utilization of the principle of irony (radical verbal irony in the Socratic sense and irony as a mode of existence that lies between the aesthetic and ethical stages of existence) as irony always requires turning someone into another, not disclosing the heart of the matter, keeping something to himself/herself etc.

22 E. Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1994, 36.

cusations Levinas brings forth against Kierkegaard's wholly egoistic conception of the Self), whereas for Levinas himself "the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign: his face in which epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us , whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference."[23] For Kierkegaard the source of disharmony is internal, it doesn't grow out of the transcendental dichotomy *the Self/the Other*, therefore, the existential communication is, first of all, a quest for the self-identity as the ideal aim. Thus *praxis* for Kierkegaard is an internally directed activity, and it is possible only if the act of special, interrupted dialogue is being performed. Somebody, and in this case Kierkegaard, stages a situation, that makes it impossible reader's identification with a text, or one or another opinion proposed there – keeping a part of information to himself he creates a distance between himself and a reader. Of course, this kind of relation is asymmetrical as one of the partners of dialogue has an advantage – only he knows the prospective scenarios of further development (this could be called the arranged dialogue), as well as the fact that this conversation will end in uncertainty and perplexity rather than in knowing and certainty. Moreover, Kierkegaard believes that a situation of existential shock is necessary for the emancipation of a reader form stale stereotypes of reading and interpretation in order to pay attention to personal attitude towards a text or a certain position encoded there and to changes within the Self that have come in the course of this interrupted dialogue. It is interesting to note that Levinas also speaks of *a traumatism of astonishment*[24] that is related to discourse as experience of something absolutely alien.

> "The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of interlocutors, and the revelation of the other to me."[25]

But at the same time the gap is being filled up with my welcoming of the other, my absolute readiness to give something of me, thus, for Levinas the absolute (inevitable) distance in the face-to-face relationship turns out to be the highest expression of proximity as a category of depth. In Kierkegaard, on the contrary, the distance between the Self and the Other is to be maintained by all means, and, paradoxically, this presupposes also the concurrent self othering (viewing oneself as the Other).

Distance and Proximity

This, in turn, leads us to the question of the hermeneutical significance of the distancing itself. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur speaks of the text as medium through which we understand ourselves giving birth

23 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., 194.
24 Ibid., 73.
25 Ibid.

to the subjectivity of the reader. The text in its written as opposed to the discourse (the world of everyday language), or dialogue implies distance by its very nature.

> "But in contrast to dialogue, this vis-à-vis is not given in the situation of discourse; it is, if I may say so, created or instituted by the work itself. A work opens up its readers and thus creates its own subjective vis-à-vis."[26]

In other words, it is a problem of appropriation of the text and application to the current situation of the reader. Ricoeur admits that appropriation is essentially and dialectically linked with distanciation, that is, appropriation doesn't close the gap but rather is a counterpart of it.

> "Thanks to distanciation by writing, appropriation no longer has any trace of affective affinity with the intention of the author. Appropriation is quite the contrary of contemporaneousness and congeniality: it is understanding at and though distance."[27]

The distanciation, in turn, makes it possible self-understanding of the reader. "…(T)o understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text.* It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity for understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed."[28] Thus the hermeneutical significance of the distance consists precisely in prompting the birth of the self during the process of reading. In other words, this kind of self-understanding generally does not take into account the extra-textual realms of existence, or at least those not embodied in a discursive form.

> "Thus we must place at the very heart of self-understanding that dialectic of objectification and understanding which we first perceived at the level of the text, its structures, its sense, and its reference. At all these levels of analysis, distanciation is the condition of understanding."[29]

Though both authors (Ricoeur and Kierkegaard) pays attention to distance as a hermeneutical tool, their approaches differ in the very essence, that is, if the Ricoerian approach is rooted in the discursive structures themselves, then the Kierkegaardian one – brings the distance in the field of existential contradiction and tensions involving a number of quasi-theoretical distinctions, for instance, silence as a mode of existence, reading as the process of self-interpretation in existence, hence the reading ceases to be just a textual affair it has to be view within the broader (ethical, religious, cultural, social) framework. In other words, the weight here is put upon the acting person (the word 'action' taken in the widest sense possible).

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26 P. Ricoeur: The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation, in: *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics*, vol. II, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 1991, 87.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 88.

29 Ibid.

He writes: "... since thought does not understand itself, does not love itself until it is caught up in the other's being, and for such harmonious beings it becomes not only unimportant but also impossible to determine what belongs to each one, because the one always owns nothing but owns everything in the other."[30] Namely, the self-knowing starts precisely the moment we become the co-owners of other person's knowledge about us (the intention of identification), as a result the border between me and the other disappears and I end up in recognition of my inner poverty and of the fact that I can be a source of other person's self-knowing as well. In contrary to this, Kierkegaard's existential maeutics presupposes the Self's turning to itself first (the waking up of the subjectivity) and only after that – turning towards the other. Kierkagaard's maeutics presupposes that the barrier that divides me from the other remains untouched – none of us discloses everything, we keep our secrets, and we use each other as a catalyst of self-knowing. And the key words here are – each other, that is, I voluntarily agree to be used by the other. The Kierkegaardian maeutics is directed towards the knowing subject but if the Socratic dialogue is an attempt to let the thought manifest itself in all objectivity, then the Kierkegaardian one facilitates the rise of subjectivity. The Socratic way winds up in ignorance of the world and the self within this world, the Kierkegaardian – in ignorance of the self and the world within this self. He strives to create a situation where the self-questioning would be possible. Thus Kierkegaard ascribes the existential status to the dialogue. Further on in the dissertation he analyzes differences between interrogating (*spørge*) and questioning (*udspørge*). He claims that true maeutical relation exists only in the latter occasion.

> "...(T)he subject is an account to be settled between the one asking and the one answering, and the thought development fulfills itself in this rocking gait (*alterno pede*), in this limping to both sides."[31]

This kind of dialogue is ironic by its very nature – the irony doesn't offer any solutions and conclusive remarks – everything becomes inconclusive postscript to the self-questioning.

The Neighbor

When reading S. Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in the context of being with other, we have to admit that the concept of neighbor is rather ambiguous. If, on one hand, the concept of neighbor presupposes closing the distance between I and non-I, the erosion of the dividing line, on the other hand, it involves self's introspection, i. e. marking the difference, i.e. viewing oneself and the other (the "othering" of the self). But at the same time he talks about the cancellation of the difference. In the very introduction Kierkegaard sets the stage for further investigation –

30 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1989, 30.
31 Ibid., 35.

he admits that the *Works of love* are not edifying discourses, but rather Christian reflections; since edifying discourses, in his opinion, are intended for those whose spiritual development is in the process, whereas reflections are to be read by those who are Christians but they are under the spell of stereotypes as yet. Therefore, Kierkegaard employs *You shall* rhetoric starting with traditional ethical sense of the commandment (e. g. You shall love your neighbor), but ends up with the individualized conception of it. It has to be noted that the author puts emphasis on the individual/particular as opposed to the communal/universal. This means that a person should be able to break away from the network of spiritual, social and psychological relations (such engagements that are characterized by giving preference to certain qualities of a person, be they physical, intellectual, etc.) and become the Single One, the Individual. Only after that it is possible to form the "we" relation. However, the "we" relation model for Kierkegaard is the specific one – it doesn't depend on some inherent quality of togetherness, but rather on the individuals' active position towards each other but this, in turn, requires the initial distinction I/other distinction. This distinction is being put forward in his analysis of the unhappy consciousness in the *Sickness unto Death*. The turning of the one to oneself is important, although in this the person may seem egoistic and self-centered, but it is the absolute precondition of being together with others. But is there something to be found at all? Kierkegaard asks. Maybe such I has gone to the desert, to the monastery or to the insane. Or is it just hiding under the cloak of everyday manifestations? That kind of I is sufficiently strong not to let anyone nearby. That kind of person can be a loving husband, a father, a lover, and yes – a Christian. Kierkegaard admits that this person only rarely makes visits to his true I. Is it possible to lead such kind of existing for a long time? Probably yes, but only in some occasions. Usually the person accommodates himself to the social and psychological environment, while forgetting the self, or eventually breaks up. From this point on, according to Kierkegaard, there are two possible scenarios of development – either he acquires the aura of a genius who failed to fulfill his dreams, hence always dissatisfied and resentful, or – he wants to be himself and at the same time feels his goal to be unattainable; at the same time he attends his daily chores with a flair of nonchalance though his attitude to the world has already changed. He comprehends well the distance between himself acting in a real life and himself as his true I, thus he becomes his own other. This highest form of despair Kierkegaard calls the daemonic one and its roots are to be found in the internal split and eternal distancing from others and from oneself. But then – what about the concept of *neighbor* in the *Works of Love* as it apparently presupposes at least some sense of closeness (as opposed to distancing)? It seems that Kierkegaard's conception of neighbor is *ambiguous* as it includes the dimension of distance as well opposing pairs of metaphors such as blindness/seeing, interestedness/disinterestedness, and intoxication/clarity of mind, symmetry/asymmetry, and intention/result. The stress falls upon the fact that relation with other is possible

when the asymmetry of this relation (independence of others' opinion) is established beforehand. The most telling example of this statement is the discourse *The Work of Love is Remembering One Dead.* Let's dwell on this for a moment. Talking to the living one may lead us to the faulty observations as our opponent may be hiding something, not showing.

> "But when one relates himself to one who is dead, in this relationship there is only one, for one dead is nothing actual. No one, absolutely no one, can make himself *nobody* as one dead can, for he is *nobody*; consequently there can be no talk here about irregularities in observation; here the living becomes revealed; here he must show himself exactly as he is, because one who is dead – yes, he is a clever fellow – has withdrawn himself completely; he has not the slightest influence, either disturbing or helping, on the living person who relates himself to him. One who is dead is not an actual object; he is only the occasion which continually reveals what resides in the one living who relates himself to him or which helps to make clear how it is with one living who does not relate himself to him."[32]

The only known fact is that who is dead is unchanged, and if any change takes place in the process of conversation it is change within the living one.

> "The work of love remembering one who is dead is thus a work of the most disinterested, the freest, the most faithful love."[33]

Kierkegaard is concerned with destruction of stereotypes, therefore he analyses different Christian ethical maxims offering at times quite unexpected interpretations. For instance, reflection *Mercifulness, a Work of Love, Even if It Can Give Nothing and Is Capable of Doing Nothing* he describes four problem situations with a common leitmotif – intention, but not result is of the most importance. Thus, one has a Christian duty to help one's neighbor, to associate oneself with him, but at the same time the highest level of ethical responsibility is responsibility for oneself, namely, in creation of an existential situation where the human being can start the process of self-knowing. First he refers to the parable about the merciful Samaritan who on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem finds the helpless man and tries to help him. Even if his actions wouldn't lead to saving the man's life, it is a good intention what counts. The second story regards the old woman who gets robbed of her last money on her way to the temple. Nevertheless, she continues her way and put two non-existent coins in the donation box. And Kierkegaard asks – wouldn't Christ value higher her who gave up her last savings rather than the wealthy person who contributes a lot of money? *Mercifulness has nothing to give.* The refrain of two following parables is *Mercifulness is able to do nothing.* Kierkegaard goes about like this. Let's suppose there are two travelers from Jericho to Jerusalem this time.

32 S. Kierkegaard: *Works of Love*, London: Collins 1962, 319.
33 Ibid., 328.

They both get beaten, while the first man goes on moaning, the second one is able to comfort him and find water to quench his thirst.

> "Mercy is evident most definitely when the poor one gives the two pennies which are his whole possession, when the helpless one is able to do nothing and yet is merciful."[34]

And now the final story. Some poor woman had a daughter who couldn't really unburden her mother and relieve her from the life-hardness, the only thing she is able to do is to pity; so in the eyes of the world she is a loser, since pitying is not enough to be merciful. Whereas Kierkegaard believes that the feeling for her mother is that what counts.

> "Is it mercifulness when one who can do everything does everything for the wretched? No. Is it mercifulness when one who can do just about nothing does this nothing for the wretched? No. Mercifulness is *how* this everything and this nothing are done."[35]

Again and again he stresses the aspect of intentions rather than actual deeds. But what does it mean to love one's neighbor for real? This, in turn, entails answering the question about Kierkegaard's meaning of the concept (if we may say so) of neighbor and love for that neighbor. The first answer seems obvious – the neighbor is the one who resides nearby, is the closest to us. But then Kierkegaard asks:

> "But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, that he is not, but he is just as near or ought to be just as near to you as you are to yourself. The concept of *neighbor* really means a duplicating of one's self. *Neighbor* is what philosophers would call the *other*, that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested. As far thought is concerned the *neighbor* or *other* need not even exist."[36]

In close reading it means that one's neighbor is love oneself and without this love the love for neighbor would be impossible. It would be impossible also without distinction between I and non-I. Thus identification of the lover with the loved one, the relation of empathy, in Kierkegaard's opinion, cancels the very possibility of love.

> "The command of love to one's *neighbor* therefore speaks in one at the same phrase, *as yourself,* about this neighbor love and about love to oneself."[37]

Thus again we return to the problem of distance and distancing as prerequisite of any ethical relationship, as it involves first the relation of one to oneself and then – to another (a double movement of communication). In this sense *Works of Love* can be regarded as one of the main ethical writings in Kierkegaard. J. Ferreira develops this position in

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34 S. Kierkegaard: *Works of Love*, London: Collins 1962, 300.
35 Ibid., 303.
36 Ibid., 37.
37 Ibid., 40.

her article "Moral Blindness and Moral Vision in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*". She speaks of love's asymmetrical (independency on being loved back by someone) and paradoxical (morally blinding) nature of love; the moral blindness presupposes at least some aspect of distanciation.[38] Latvian philosopher Jānis Vējš, in his turn, concludes that this text manifests the specific point of view for feelings through the man's self-apprehension of his existential situation.[39] This accounts for Kierkegaard's emphasis on paradoxical character of morals and his quest to destroy pre-existing moral stereotypes.

> "…*(N)eighbor* is definitely the middle-term of self-renunciation which steps in between self-love's Land I and also comes between erotic love's and friendship's I and the other-I."[40]

Love for one's neighbor casts out all preferential love based on certain and qualities. But at the same time we have to distinguish between erotic love/friendship and spiritual (Christian love). If the first form represents intoxication in the other-I, the second form stands for sobriety. "At the peak of love and friendship the two really become one self, one I,"[41] the selfish self. Spiritual love, on contrary, takes away all natural determinants and selfishness. Therefore love for my neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self. Love to one's neighbor is love between two individual beings, each eternally qualified as spirit. Love to one's neighbor is spiritual love, but two spirits are never able to become a single self in a selfish way.[42] This stance, to my mind, is captured the best by the means of interplay of two categories closeness/distance – closeness is possible only with establishing certain distance or, in Kierkegaard's words "one sees his neighbor only with closed eyes..."[43] This leads us to the next question: How can we define the beloved in the terms of I-relation? In erotic relationship one loves the other as his other-I "but the beloved whom he loves as *himself* is not his neighbor; the beloved is his other-I. Whether we talk of the first-I or the other-I, we do not come a step closer to one's neighbor, for one's neighbor is the first *Thou*."[44] The first-I's love for the other-I is, after all, the self-love and in the strictest sense the self-deification.

> "In love and friendship preference is the middle term; in love to one's neighbor God is the middle term."[45]

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38 J. Ferreira: Moral Blindness and Moral Vision in Kierkegaard's *Work of Life*, in: *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997, 206–222.

39 J. Vējš: Poēta un kristieša pretnostatījums Kirkegora sacerējumā *Mīlestības darbi*, in: *Darbdienas filozofija: ieskats analītiskajā domāšanā*, 2005, 333.

40 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, op. cit., 66–67.

41 Ibid., 68.

42 Ibid., 68–69.

43 Ibid., 79.

44 Ibid., 69.

45 Ibid., 70.

In this sense the neighbor can be qualified as man's equal before God that stands for equality of humanity. This context of proximity/distance, separation/unification should be taken into account when thinking about problems of existential/existence communication.

Double Movement of Communication

The concept of the double movement of communication is the decisive one in understanding Kierkegaard's theory of existential communication. On one level the double movement means communication on the level of the individual (communication with oneself as one's first thou), that presupposes first of all the self-estrangement or the revocation of one's identity and only then – the movement towards the authenticity of the self. On the other level the double movement means first of all the separation of the individual and only after that – relations with other people. It is important to note that in both cases the intermediary and the principal guarantor of humanity for Kierkegaard is God. Still Kierkegaard's prime interest lies in the subjectivity, in the subjective world-view, therefore it may occur that on the social level his vision of communication is one-sided and egoistic and the questions posed by the individual subject can be like these: In what way other selves affect conditions of my own existence? How other people affect my worldview? And, finally – how would my transformed self (after the double movement) perceive others? But in Kierkegaard's case it is not so simple since during the double movement the self becomes the other for oneself and the other selves becomes conditions for my subjectivity. Moreover, the position of the self is not the exclusive one because the similar questions can be posed by other individuals as well. And the questions mentioned above can now be rephrased in the following way. How I as a person affect existential condition of other human beings? What changes I evoke in others? And, finally, what would be the attitude of others to the transformed me now? According to Kierkegaard the first movement (the isolation) means that the self is something already given but yet not comprehended. Thus, all expressions like to choose oneself, to obtain oneself, to capture oneself can be interpreted as becoming the concrete individual, the one we really are.

The self accomplishes the initial separation, that is, admits oneself as being different – different from oneself and different from others thus excluding oneself from his concrete historical existence whereas the countermovement is returning to the concreteness and historicity, and the web of social relations. Now it is time for Kierkegaard to ask the question about the authenticity/inauthenticity of human relations. He believes that inauthentic relations between human beings stem from their inauthentic self-realization, namely, from their inability to view themselves as individuals and hence inability to take on the ethical responsibility. Therefore, the act of self-realization is the absolute precondition for any significant human relation. The explication of the problem of double communication is to be found in *Either – Or*, more precisely,

in the second letter written by Judge William called "Equilibrium between the aesthetic and the ethical". Judge William states:

> "The person who has chosen and found himself ethically has himself as specifies in all his concretion. He has himself, then, as an individual who has these abilities, those passions, these inclinations, these habits subject to these external influences, and who is influenced thus in one direction and thus in another… The self which is the aim is not just a personal self, but a social, civic self."[46]

Thus, if the first movement of communication is the act of isolation, the second act (counter movement) is taking up responsibility for oneself and for others, these are grounds for continuity, and unless the individual has not apprehended himself as a concrete personality in continuity first, he wouldn't feel the continuity with others later on.

> "The personal life as such was an isolation and therefore incomplete, but by his coming back to his personal being through the civic life the personal life is manifested in a higher form. Personal being proves to be the absolute that has its teleology in itself."[47]

Now it is time to return to the questions posed in the beginning of the present article: *How can we be together? What is the form of the possible togetherness, according to Kierkegaard?* After analysis of such basic concepts as the individual, the other, the distanciation, the neighbor and, finally, the double movement of communication we may conclude that togetherness for Kierkegaard takes a form of inter-existentiality, since each and every self must turn towards oneself, must establish oneself prior to reaching out to others, there is always something left behind that cannot be communicated fully. Still, by apprehending his or her actuality on the ethical level, the individual becomes involved in a social life albeit sometimes in a little limited manner.

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46 S. Kierkegaard: *Either/Or,* London: Penguin Books, 1992, 553.

47 Ibid.

"AS THE HISTORY OF THE RACE MOVES ON, THE INDIVIDUAL BEGINS CONSTANTLY ANEW". The Relevance of Kierkegaard's Concept of the Single Individual for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Alice Holzhey-Kunz[1]

Abstract

When we strip Kierkegaard's concept of the "single individual" of its religious connotations we get the most radical and at the same time the most truthful explanation of what it means to be human. This article explains first why the thesis of an "existential solipsism" (Heidegger) is immune to all objections made from an intersubjective perspective. Then it unfolds the subject by explaining: (a) why everyone has "constantly to begin anew", (b) why this existential truth is disclosed in "anxiety", and c) why we generally are in "despair" about this truth and try to escape it. In the second part Freud's hermeneutic concept of neurotic suffering as a "suffering from reminiscences" is introduced and related to Kierkegaard's theory of despair. From Kierkegaard's viewpoint "suffering from reminiscences" can be interpreted as a form of being in despair about how the own life has begun and of struggling incessantly to change what cannot be changed anymore, namely the own childhood history. However the Oedipus complex – for Freud the "nucleus" of all neurosis – can be understood as a metaphor for becoming "this single individual" who has to choose how to live his own life, becoming inevitably guilty through this choice.

Keywords: This single existing individual, existential solipsism, anxiety, forms of despair, psychoanalysis, suffering from reminiscences, hermeneutics, guilt.

"The single individual" – from a religious to a philosophical concept

The concept of the single individual (in German: *dieser Einzelne*) belongs to Kierkegaard's religious thinking. For Kierkegaard the single individual is a human being related to God or better: before God. As a religious, respectively Christian, category "the individual" is the opposite of "the crowd" and of "the Church" as the official Christian community. Kierkegaard was deeply con-

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vinced that the Christian God is not related to the masses or to institutions like the Church, but is only related to each single existing individual. God looks only for the single individual, he speaks only to him.

The sentence I have chosen as the title of my lecture: "As the history of the [human] race moves on, the individual begins constantly anew", is situated in a religious context, where Kierkegaard speaks about the Christian dogma of hereditary sin in the first chapter of "The Concept of Anxiety". There he argues as follows: If a man were to inherit sinfulness, he would be a sinner before committing an actual sin himself, he would be identical with the human race, respectively with the history of the human race. But because every man is an individual, and as an individual "is both, the race and himself"[2], every single man becomes a sinner by committing his own first sin. So even when it is true that for the first time sin came into the world through Adam because he was the first man, "in the same way it is true of every subsequent man's first sin that through it sin comes into the world"[3]. So it is not Adam's first sin which determines the following generations and determines every subsequent individual, but every single individual becomes a sinner through his own first sin. In this context we find the sentence, that "as the history of the race moves on, the individual begins constantly anew"[4]. Evidently Kierkegaard wants to make clear that no one can avoid becoming a sinner by committing a sin himself. But this does not yet explain why the individual does not just begin once by committing his own first sin, but begins constantly anew.

Before I pursue this problem, I would like to make clear that I consider the concept of the single individual as a piece of modern philosophy more than of theology. Whereas Kierkegaard asks the theological question why no one can avoid becoming a sinner, I prefer the philosophical equivalent why no one can avoid becoming guilty. Doing so I take the term "this single individual" as a philosophical-anthropological term, following in this respect Heidegger and Sartre, and later on Michael Theunissen[5]. Like them I consider the concept of the single individual as the answer Kierkegaard gives to the fundamental philosophical question of what it means to be human. Seen as a philosophical concept its message is even more radical, because now being this single individual is just a contingent fact and as such the last groundless ground which has to be taken over by each individual him- or herself and has to be lived as his or her fate. And whereas sin may not be avoidable, but can be forgiven by God under the condition that the single individual truly repents his sins, being ontologically (or: existentially) guilty is a burden on the shoulders of every single individual without any prospect of relief.

2 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Deliberation On the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and transl. R. Thomte and A.B. Anderson, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1980, 28.

3 Ibid., 31.

4 Ibid., 29.

5 M. Theunissen: *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair*, transl. B. Harshav and H. Illbruck, Princeton University Press 2005, 3 f.

Even these short remarks reveal that in a philosophical view the single individual is the most radical and at the same time the most concrete concept of subjectivity. Being a subject now means being this single existing individual who begins constantly anew under the given human condition.

In the "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments", which Kierkegaard published in 1846, two years after "The Concept of Anxiety", he again speaks about "the individual" and "the human race", but now more specifically as a battle with Hegel and speculative idealism. He refers to Hegel's theory of the development of the human race, respectively of the human spirit, which, according to Hegel, has now reached its highest and final stage of pure spirit and has left earlier stages behind.[6] Now Kierkegaard mockingly asks what happens with all the individuals born in the 19th century: "But then in our day a generation of individuals is born who have neither imagination nor feeling – is born to begin with § 14 in the system?" And then he gives the following warning directed against the dominant Hegelianism of his time: "Above all, let us not confuse the world-historical development of the human spirit with the particular individuals."[7]

"A spirit existing for himself"

Why is it so important to take into account that the single individual is not just part of the human race, but is also himself? Here Kierkegaard's term "existence" is central: "In existence, there are only individual human beings"[8]. Because all human beings "exist", they are individuals and not just part of the race. This is even true for thinking, which is traditionally taken as an abstract thing, but is in fact something the single individual "exists": "...the abstraction of thinking is a phantom that disappears before the actuality of existence", and: "With respect to existence, thinking is not at all superior to imagination and feeling but is coordinate."[9]

Kierkegaard is often called the father of existential philosophy, because he has introduced the term *existence* into philosophy. This was a real innovation because until then philosophy was concerned only with the *essence* of things, and not with their existing or not existing in reality. There was only one exception on behalf of God's existence, because it was so important to bring forward proofs of it. But when Kierkegaard defines the human being as this single individual, he has to step out of this kind of "essentialism", because "the single individual" is either "this *existing* single individual" or it is not. Therefore to exist is now the central point of the essence of any individual.

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6 S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1992, 343 (§ 3).

7 Ibid., 345.

8 Ibid., 346.

9 Ibid.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard maintains again and again:

> "That the knowing spirit is an existing spirit, and that every human being is such a spirit existing for himself, I cannot repeat often enough."[10]

Of himself Kierkegaard says not without pride: "I am indeed a poor existing spirit like all other human beings" and "I would rather remain what I am, a poor existing individual human being", because this is the only "legitimate and honest way" to be. He makes fun of Hegel when he calls him "the exalted wisdom" which "has again been absentminded enough to forget that it was an *existing* spirit who asked about truth".[11]

When Kierkegaard speaks of "the spirit" as "existing for himself", he makes clear that he gives the term "existing" a new and more specific meaning: "to exist" means now "to be for oneself" and this self-relatedness is crucial for being a single existing individual. Because the single existing individual is always already related to himself, he is more than just an example of the race, but a subject who has constantly to begin anew. Animals are not individual subjects, but just examples of their race, because they do not "exist for themselves".

Heidegger who has certainly borrowed more from Kierkegaard than he was willing to admit, says with quite simple words what it actually means "to exist", when he equates in "Being and Time" "existing" with "having to be" instead of simply being "objectively present" (*Vorhandensein*). The human being is never simply objectively present but *has to be* in the sense that he has to take over his life as "always my own".[12] But it would be a misunderstanding to regard "having to be" as a given duty we can either fulfil or not fulfil. "Having to be" belongs to the human condition and is therefore a task everybody always already assumes in some way or other, and we do so even if we do not take life in our own hands but live entirely non-autonomously, allowing ourselves to be led by others or even to drift aimlessly along.

An existential concept of individuality

Kierkegaard's existential concept of individuality is quite different from the traditional one. Usually being an individual refers to the specific features and attributes someone has, including his individual capacities and deficiencies, his individual space and time, his individual origin, his individual bodily appearance (traits) and so forth. Therefore it is all this together which makes every individual unique and therefore different from all the other human beings who ever have been and ever will be. *Existentially* being a single individual refers first of all to the mere fact of *having to be "for" respectively "by himself"*. In this new sense every human being is always already an individual because only

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10 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., 189.

11 Ibid., 192.

12 M. Heidegger: *Being and Time*, transl. J. Stambough, State University of New York Press 1996, 39.

the single individual can take over the task of living his own life and exist it constantly anew under the given conditions. For the existential concept of individuality it is crucial that there is no possibility of either delegating the task of taking over and living his own life to other human beings or fulfilling this task collectively instead of individually, together with others instead of alone. Having no choice other than to exist "for (or by) himself" makes every human being a single individual.

Now we understand a little better why in Kierkegaard's view the individual has to begin *constantly* anew. The individual does not begin to live once at a certain time and then leaves his beginning behind, but he is constantly anew at the point to *exist* his beginning as long as he lives. Therefore to begin life is never done once and for ever, but remains a never-ending task one has to fulfil again and again "anew".

However again it is important not to misunderstand this. In the usual traditional sense when we speak of "beginning anew" we mean to leave behind what has been, to cut off old ties, commitments and dependencies and to start a new life totally different from the old one. Of course this is not what Kierkegaard means. Not only is every individual born in a certain time and space and in this respect part of the history of the race, but is also born with inherited features which will be his own as long as he lives, and is born as the child of these and no other parents – a fact he cannot change by his own will. He cannot get rid of either his genetic make-up or his concrete beginning as the child of these particular parents, even when he tries to change his life with great effort.

So "beginning constantly *anew*" has another, an *existential* meaning: it does not mean to be in a constant process of self-creation becoming constantly a new person inwardly and outwardly, but to *exist* what we have been in the past, to exist our own history, to exist our own beginning. To begin constantly anew means to take over our own past as a never-ending act of existing it anew. To take over the own past is a task every individual has to fulfil constantly anew, be it in the form of *remembering* it or of *forgetting*, respectively repressing, the memories of it, be it in constantly wrestling with it, or in slowly or suddenly changing his mind about it.

Why Martin Buber's objection falls short

Although we have now reached the subject of the subtitle of my lecture "The relevance of Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual for psychoanalytic psychotherapy", I would prefer first to present and discuss an objection made to Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual. It stems from *Martin Buber* and is to be found in his essay about *I and Thou*.[13] The discussion of Buber's thesis will help us to gain a clearer understanding of why the pure fact of being this single individual is a *final given* and as such inescapable.

For Buber human relations are defined by two word pairs: "I-Thou" and "I-It". But this alone would not be worth mentioning. Buber was

[13] M. Buber: *I and Thou*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1937.

convinced that the three primary words "I", "You" and "It" are in truth not isolated, but combined words, always already bound together in two basic "*word pairs*": the word pair "I-Thou" and the word pair "I-It".[14] This alleged "discovery", which made Buber famous, was meant as an attack on Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual, respectively as an overcoming of the error of a solipsistic "I". When the word "I" belongs always already to a word partner, as Buber maintains, the concept of the human being as this single individual is revealed as an undue separation and therefore reduction of what every individual always already is: being *with* others and only existing in this togetherness with either "you" or "it".

Ludwig Binswanger, the Swiss psychiatrist, disciple and friend of Freud and founder of Dasein-analysis, was deeply impressed by Buber's work about *I and Thou*. He developed a theory of togetherness based on Buber with the purpose of overcoming Heidegger's concept of Dasein as "always being-mine" respectively as "always being my own".[15] Binswanger is quite right when he sees in Heidegger the faithful disciple of Kierkegaard. So when he states against Heidegger that it is a fundamental error to conceive Dasein (the human being) as "always being-mine" (because it makes an ontological truth out of what is in fact just a deficient form of being), this is also said against Kierkegaard and his concept of the single individual. According to Binswanger Dasein in its essence is by no means "being-mine", but is "being-ours". Therefore whenever someone experiences himself as a single individual who feels that he is not able or not willing to overcome his singleness, this is the result of his being incapable of experiencing love and loving togetherness with a "Thou". Binswanger concludes that because of such an incapability or unwillingness a person does not only miss the essence of being human, but he is a psychopathological case, in short a neurotic. It appears from this that when Kierkegaard defines a human being as a single individual, he unjustly universalizes a neurotic state of existence.

Let us now ask if Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual is really disproved by the argument of Buber. I do not think so, even when Buber of course is right with his thesis that the "I" is not a self-contained, isolated subject-thing, but exists always already in relation to something or someone other. I find the decisive argument against Buber in Kierkegaard's definition of the self. Kierkegaard gives this definition at the beginning of his essay *The Sickness unto Death*: "The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself." And because Kierkegaard knows how quickly the essential core of his statement can be overheard he says the

14 Buber, op. cit., 3.

15 L. Binswanger: *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins*, Ausgew. Werke Bd. 2, Asanger Verlag Heidelberg 1993; A. Holzhey-Kunz: Ludwig Binswanger: Psychiatry Based on the Foundation of Philosophical Anthropology, in: E. Wolpert, K. Maurer, A. Hind Rifai, E.U. Vorbach, M. Hambrecht (eds) *Images in Psychiatry. German Speaking Countries*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2006, 271–288.

same once more: “The self is not the relation but the relation’s relating to itself.”[16]

Instead of dealing with how Kierkegaard unfolds the meaning of selfhood as a relation between “the infinite and the finite”, “the temporal and the eternal”, and “freedom and necessity”, I transport his definition of the self as the *relations relating to itself* into the 20th century discussion of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. In this context the first part of his definition of the self (the self as a relation) means that it is no isolated subject-thing but has its being always already in the relationship to himself and to others. So Buber’s thesis that the “I” belongs either to the word pair “I-Thou” or the word pair “I-It” does in fact not go beyond this relational understanding of the self by Kierkegaard. It just adds the distinction between two fundamental forms of the self which depend on either being related to a “Thou” or to an “It”.

I would like to show now in more detail why the position of Kierkegaard cannot be disproved by either the position of Buber or any other intersubjective position. The latter has certainly a strong argument against any concept of traditional solipsism, but not against what Heidegger calls in Being and Time an “existential ‘solipsism’”[17]. This “solipsism” is founded in Kierkegaard’s discovery that the self is not a simple relation, but “a relation that relates to itself”. Because of this *twofold relation of the self* Kierkegaard’s theory of “this single existing individual” stays intact even when it is true that the self is always already related to others. Let us take an example for a better understanding of what Kierkegaard means when he defines the self as “the relation’s relating to itself”.

When I am related to someone in love, then, according to Buber, I stay in an I-Thou-relationship with this other person. Now we can learn from Kierkegaard that this is not all, because additionally to this I relate myself to my being in love with a thou. This additional relation to my being related to a loved person appears in the form of emotions and/or judgements: I can feel grateful for this love or I can regret this love because I think it makes me unfree, dependent, lose my autonomy; I can be proud or ashamed of this my love and so forth. In our days the American philosopher *Harry Frankfurt* has spoken of “secondary volitions” or “higher volitions” (or “desires”), and this was widely welcomed as a new discovery.[18] But is it more than just a reception of Kierkegaard’s definition of the self as a twofold relation? Already for Kierkegaard being a self implied having always already this secondary or higher relation to its own being related to the world and to itself.

16 S. Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, Penguin Books 2004, 43.

17 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 176.

18 H. Frankfurt: Freedom of the Will and the Concept of Person, in: *Journal of Philosophy*, 1971, 68(1): 5–20.

Why the single individual has to begin constantly anew

It is because of this secondary or higher relation to our being that always already related to ourselves and others which makes each human being a single individual who has to begin constantly anew. To begin constantly anew means in the case of a love relationship, that our love has not begun at a certain time and then goes on as long as we are bound together in love, but each of us begins this togetherness with the loved one constantly anew by actively consenting to it day by day, by actively choosing the other anew as the one still worth loving anew. This choosing the other, respectively choosing the relationship with him, constantly anew is nothing we can do together or one of us can do for the other one, but each of us can only do on his own and only for himself or herself – as this single existing individual.

In short we can hold on to Kierkegaard because his existential concept of radical subjectivity cannot be disproved by any intersubjective arguments. Because we cannot do otherwise than additionally relate ourselves to all our relationships to others, each of us is inevitably this single individual as long as he does not lose consciousness. Singleness and a final solitude are not just psychological phenomena depending on individual or social terms but belong to the human condition. Therefore also Binswanger is wrong with his diagnosis of the concept of the single individual as taken from neurosis.

Despair as a form of negating the own singleness

For some time I was in two minds as whether to speak at this conference about Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual or about his concept of anxiety. Anxiety is, as Kierkegaard puts it, "totally different from fear", because its object is "a nothing".[19] Although it is not possible here to give justice to what Kierkegaard means when he defines the object of anxiety "a nothing", it may be important to make clear that for Kierkegaard "anxiety" is by no means without any object, as is often heard. In fact the object of anxiety is just "a nothing" compared with the specific objects of fear. Whereas fear is related to all the possible dangers which can threaten my life or the life of others, anxiety by contrast is only related to the existential fact of my being this single existing individual. Anxiety discloses nothing else than just this pure, naked fact. – This leads me to the incidental remark that if Buber and the intersubjectivists were right about their objection to Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual, then there would not be any "anxiety" in the world but just "fear". – There is another important difference between fear and anxiety. Whereas fear is often not related to real dangers but to unreal ones, anxiety can never be just a result of paranoid fantasies, but unveils always the truth. Anxiety is the existential-ontological experience of being inevitably an existing individual which cannot escape its

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[19] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, op. cit., 42.

singleness and, coupled with it, its final solitude, because both belong to the human condition.

When Kierkegaard states that "whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate"[20], he advises each of us to learn it. This advice would not make any sense if he did not think each of us at least in principle *able* to learn it. But between being able and *being willing* there is a wide gap. Kierkegaard's essay about *The Sickness unto Death* analyzes the different forms of *denying* one's own singleness. We cannot escape being single individuals, but we always take a stand on it in *choosing* either to accept or to deny it.

Kierkegaard calls the different forms of denying the own singleness *"forms of despair"* and he distinguishes between two forms of authentic despair: "not wanting to be oneself" (in the sense of: "wanting to be rid of oneself") on the one hand, and "wanting in despair to be oneself" on the other hand.[21]

In the following I will try to interpret Sigmund Freud's concept of neurosis as a specific form of despair, in which both forms of "authentic despair" so neatly separated by Kierkegaard always go together.

"Suffering from reminiscences" as suffering from the own beginning

When I speak now about psychoanalysis it is highly important to keep in mind that psychoanalytic psychotherapy is not just one form of psychotherapy among others, because it is – unlike all other psychotherapies – not just a tool or a set of therapeutic strategies and techniques you can use and eventually combine with other techniques in an eclectic way. Whatever the psychoanalyst says, however he intervenes, follows from his very specific theoretical approach to neurotic suffering. Only Freud contradicted – and psychoanalysis still contradicts – the medical-psychiatric view of mental suffering as suffering from a "*mental illness*" respectively from a "*mental disorder*". Against this still dominant view Freud set the understanding of neurotic and even psychotic suffering as a "*suffering from reminiscences*"[22].

I will dwell a little on the expression "suffering from reminiscences". "Reminiscences" in the Freudian sense are repressed childhood memories which are now unconscious. So we can say that Freud discovered neurotic suffering as an *unconscious suffering from the own beginning*. Whoever suffers from reminiscences suffers from how his life began. Freud links neurotic suffering to the past because he is deeply convinced that what happens then and there at the beginning is decisive for how every single individual will live his life later on, be this life disturbed by neurotic symptoms or not.

But when it comes to neurotic suffering from "how the own life has begun", we find in Freud a deep ambivalence about the role of the in-

[20] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, op. cit., 155.
[21] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, op. cit., 43.
[22] S. Freud: *Studies on Hysteria*, Deutsch: Ges. Werke Bd. I, 75–312; 86.

dividual self in this suffering. Although we can say that for Freud "suffering" is a kind of being related as this individual self to the own beginning, we find two contradictory definitions of this relationship: an *objective- deterministic* one and a *subjective-hermeneutic* one. The deterministic definition belongs to his understanding of psychoanalysis as a *natural science* of the human psyche. Here the neurotic individual is dependent and determined by how it has begun, because, as a result of the repression of early memories, the subject is subjugated under the laws of the unconscious. Instead of following his own intentions the subject is now determined by what Freud calls the "repetition compulsion". He has lost the possibility of beginning constantly anew, and cannot do anything other than pointlessly and uselessly repeat again and again the old repressed memories.

In the other, hermeneutic version, "suffering from reminiscences" means something quite different, namely a constant new rebellion of the adult individual against how it has begun for him, a rebellion with the illusionary purpose to change what cannot be changed anymore: namely how it has begun. Freud gives a small example I will quote here. It concerns a typical transference situation in therapy:

> "The patient does not remember that he used to be defiant and critical towards his parents' authority, instead he behaves in that way to the doctor"[23].

This example can be interpreted in both ways. In the deterministic way the patient is forced to behave in this way to his analyst by the repetition compulsion, albeit this early rebellion has long since lost being meaningful for the patient. In the hermeneutic way however this "transference" from what happened then and there with his father to his analyst here and now is not determined by unconscious forces, but has a hidden purpose and the patient is still not willing to stop revolting against the analyst because of this purpose. It is of course an illusionary purpose, namely to finally defeat his father and by defeating him change his own beginning. The patient needs to insist on making his purpose real because how it has begun then and there seems unbearable for him – more exactly: It seems unbearable for him to take over his own life under the given conditions of having been defeated by the father and by having been forced to abandon his most important desire.

I will come back to the meaning of this desire. But beforehand let us acknowledge how much Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual coincides with the hermeneutic version of "suffering from reminiscences". As soon as we hold on to Kierkegaard's notion of the single individual, neurotic suffering has to be understood as a form of *active negation of how it has begun*. Any deterministic version is not compatible with Kierkegaard, be it the version of Freud himself or the version

23 S. Freud: *Remembering, repeating and working-through. S. E.*, 12; 150.

the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has proposed in his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*[24].

"Suffering from reminiscences" as a revolt against being this single individual with this unchangeable own beginning

Let us now take a closer look at what Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual and Freud's concept of neurotic suffering have in common. When a neurotic person constantly struggles with his past he does so despairing about the truth that everybody has to take over his own past into his own present and future. Because the neurotic is realistic enough to know that what is true for everybody is also true for him, he feels so desperate about it. His neurotic suffering is *his* form of being in despair. For Kierkegaard being in despair means either "not wanting to be oneself" or "wanting desperately to be oneself". When we reformulate both versions of despair in relation to our own beginning, then "not wanting to be oneself" reads as "not wanting to be oneself under the given conditions of how it has begun then and there"; and "wanting desperately to be oneself" reads then as "wanting desperately to be oneself with another, a new beginning, a beginning one has chosen oneself."

When we apply the first reformulated version to Freud's patient, who is defiant towards his analyst, then we can say that "this adult man *does not want to be himself under the given conditions* of having been defeated by his father as a young boy and having been forced to abandon his most important desire to fight back and win". But we see at once that we can apply the second reformulated version as well, and say that "this adult man *is wanting desperately to be himself under conditions* which are changed for the better, namely of not having been defeated by his father but having been able to resist and defeat him". So what for Kierkegaard seems to be an "either – or" of two different forms of despair: either "not wanting to be oneself" or "wanting desperately to be oneself", fall together in neurotic suffering. The neurotic does not just reject "how" it has begun with him, but he tries desperately to change this "how" with the aim of becoming the self he desperately wants to be, which is the same as to create his history anew "on his own, all on his own".[25]

The double meaning of "suffering from how it has begun"

But to realize that in "suffering from reminiscences" the two forms of despair are in fact one and the same form is only one thing. The other thing is to realize that this one and the same form of despair is not always *about* the same, because when we speak of "how it has begun" the "how" has a double meaning we have ignored until now. "How it has begun" can either mean "how it has begun with me *as this individual person*", or it can mean "how it has begun with me as a human being". I think that the majority of psychoanalysts today take mainly the first

24 J. Habermas: *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp 1968, 312, 330.

25 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, op. cit., 44.

"how" into consideration: how a patient as this individual person was cared for or not cared for at his beginning, which individual traumas of either losses or abuses he or she had to endure during early childhood. But Freud and many other important psychoanalysts were more interested in the general "how" of fundamental difficulties in early childhood. Otto Rank, a disciple of Freud, found out the fact of having to endure birth as *traumatic* for every little human being; and likewise all later losses the baby cannot be protected from: the end of breastfeeding, the birth of a sibling and rival for the love of the parents, and last but not least the phase of the so called "Oedipus complex" which Freud marked as the "nucleus of neurosis".

I think that Kierkegaard helps not only to dismiss any deterministic explanation of suffering from reminiscences, but also to understand why one can suffer from the own beginning even when the individual conditions of the beginning have been mostly good. I said already that the psychoanalytic mainstream tends to link all mental suffering to bad personal conditions at the beginning and therefore understands "suffering from reminiscences" as a suffering from concrete traumatic experiences at the own beginning then and there. Kierkegaard by contrast supports the seemingly antiquated theory of the so-called Oedipus complex as the nucleus of neurosis. According to Freud the Oedipus complex is a set of experiences every child has to go through in one way or the other. And these experiences are *in principle* the same, independent of the family and social situation of early childhood.

The Freudian Oedipus complex as a metaphor for being inevitably this single individual

When we take a look at the essence of the oedipal experiences, we will see very soon how near they are to what Kierkegaard describes as the experience of being this single existing individual who has to begin constantly anew.

Everybody knows the constitutive elements of the Oedipus complex in the case of being a boy: being in love with the own mother, rivalry with the own father and castration anxiety. But more fundamentally the oedipal phase heralds for both, the boy and the girl, one basic experience. It all begins with the discovery that the mother is a *whole person*, with her own interests and wishes that she also directs towards other people, mostly the father of the child, and that normally the father and the mother *share a sexual love-relationship that excludes the child.* This experience is in every case highly threatening, since it demonstrates to the child that it is expelled from what father and mother mysteriously and exclusively share with each other. This is like a second birth – the birth of the child as this single individual. Although from birth onwards the mother is only intermittently available, the child can still hold on to the illusion of an inseparable togetherness with his or her mother, however imperfect this togetherness may be. Only in the oedipal phase does the fundamental belonging prove to be an illusion, which triggers

anxiety (not fear!). The oedipal desire arises in response to this threat. In the oedipal wish to win back the mother for himself and exclude the father, the boy seeks to deny the existential-ontological fact of his becoming a single person of his own. So we understand now the context of Freud's patient being so defiant to the analyst. He is desperately trying to deny the undeniable truth of having to live separated from his mother by struggling against the dominance of the father/analyst who wants him to become what he has to be: this single existing individual.

Is "Suffering from reminiscences" a form of trying to postpone the dreaded task of beginning the own life on one's own?

To conclude I would like to put once more the aspect of "beginning constantly anew" in the foreground. We have already made clear that Kierkegaard does not mean that the individual creates himself constantly anew, but that he has to assume the task to exist his own life constantly anew under the given natural and historical conditions. But nevertheless whenever we begin something this beginning is directed to the temporal dimension of the *future*. Neurotic suffering however, understood as a "suffering from reminiscences", is primarily directed to the temporal dimension of the *past*. Freud was obsessed by the idea that neurotic suffering is always and only a suffering from one's own past. The opposite possibility of a neurotic suffering, namely from what will come in the future, from a possible failure of the own beginning, from the basic uncertainty waiting in the future including the own death, was not in his mind. This one-sidedness becomes especially clear when he proposes in 1920 the so-called "death drive", which he understands as the one of two basic drives which forces us all back to that primal beginning from which all life emerges. Here again Kierkegaard's understanding of the single individual which has to begin "constantly anew" can act as a counterbalance.

So let me just ask some questions which are inspired by Kierkegaard and which transcend the psychoanalytic perspective:

Could it be that the neurotic person is much more sensitive to the fact of his own singleness than mentally healthy people are? Could it be that mentally healthy people can suppress this uncanny truth and therefore are to a lesser extent forced to evade the dimension of the future?

Is the neurotic in contrast to mentally healthy people so interested in struggling with the own beginning because the dimension of the future is too threatening for him? Could it be that always being concerned with "how it has begun" has the function of making the future unreal, and what could await us there seem irrelevant?

Could it be that suffering from reminiscences has the hidden purpose of desperately postponing the dreaded day of really beginning one's own life as this single individual and facing uncertainty and death?

Guilty or not?

How can we understand why the neurotic should be so anxious about *accepting* his life which he has to take over as his very own and begin constantly anew? Again Kierkegaard can help us to find an answer. You all know his famous words about "anxiety as the dizziness of freedom". Kierkegaard describes here what happens when the individual really begins to live his own life as his very own: "in that very moment everything is changed, and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty".[26] Sartre reformulates this insight when he states that "the peculiar character of human-reality is that it is without excuse."[27]

At the beginning of my lecture I mentioned that Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual belongs to the theological context of "hereditary sin". But when we understand what Kierkegaard says about being guilty philosophically instead of theologically we can at least assume that the neurotic is especially sensitive for the truth of existential guilt which is by no means avoidable. This assumption coincides with my experience as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. In my practice I encounter again and again individuals who feel guilty all the time, but in fact they feel guilty not because they have done something morally bad or at least morally questionable, but because they insist on a life in total innocence. They want an excuse not only for everything they do, but also for the pure fact of living instead of not living at all.

Suffering from reminiscences often has the purpose of denying the fact of always being already guilty as this living individual. Suffering from reminiscences enables the neurotic to live backwards instead of forwards, being absorbed by what has been instead of shaping the own future in taking own decisions, remaining bound to infantile behavior instead of becoming an independent (adult) individual. These patients would not prefer to stay in a neurotic position if they were not so extremely sensitive for the truth that shaping the own future makes everyone inevitably guilty. They shrink back from every decision because they are so sensitive for the unavoidable guilt which is implied in every decision. But there is still another reason to shrink back from taking over one's own life as this single individual – an even more fundamental reason. Because of their special sensitivity for the human condition neurotics do not find a "legitimate and honest way" (Kierkegaard) to begin their own life on their own. They know that there is no entitlement from anywhere to begin their own life and occupy a place in this world which no other person can claim at the same time. So they do not feel authorized for their own beginning but do not dare what is inevitable, namely just to usurp the right for themselves to exist as these single individuals. In other words: neurotics shrink back from the act of self-authorisation which is demanded from them. For them this would be an act of hubris which they try to avoid in living backwards instead of forwards.

26 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, op. cit., 61.
27 J.-P. Sartre: *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. H. Barnes, London: Routledge 2008, 575.

The existential meaning of the Freudian rule of free association

Finally I would like to take a short look at the Freudian *rule of free association*. You may guess why. Freud wanted this rule to be the fundamental rule of psychoanalytic therapy.[28] As you know this rule applies to the patient and advises him to say everything that comes spontaneously into his mind. What an unusual rule! What is its purpose? The patient, who tries what he is told to do, namely saying everything that comes to his mind without any restriction, cannot do other than realize that he is this single individual who has to begin constantly anew. In an analytic session not the analyst but the patient always speaks first; and not just at the beginning of the session, but again and again by telling spontaneously what comes into his mind. The patient is by no means happy about this rule. Freud describes how it provokes the patient's resistance.[29] He insists that nothing comes to his mind any more and keeps silent, or he begs the analyst to ask him questions he is able to answer, or he tries to remember the end of the last session so he can take it up again – in other words: he desperately tries to escape the experience of being exposed as this single individual to the analyst as the other in his pure otherness.

For Freud psychoanalysis as therapy is "educating himself to truth about himself".[30] Whatever comes into the patient's mind – just trying to follow the rule of free association is certainly the best education in becoming this single existing individual which has to begin constantly anew in living his own life.

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28 S. Freud: *On beginning the treatment. S. E.*, 12, 134.
29 S. Freud: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. S. E.*, 15–16, 288.
30 Ibid., 434.

MY JOURNEY WITH KIERKEGAARD: FROM THE PARADOXICAL SELF TO THE POLARIZED MIND

Kirk Schneider[1]

Abstract

The article investigates how radical, or paradoxical, experience (such as loss, death anxiety etc.) forms an essential dimension of human's relation to existence, and how this very relation could become fruitful in case of proper attitude. The author defines human experience as constrictive/expansive continuum only degrees of which are conscious: denial or avoidance of these polarities cause disorders and suffering, whereas coexistence with it associates with vital living. In this regard the author discusses implications of Kierkegaard's conception of self as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude and its manifold relations to itself and the world, and relevance of his works to clinical psychology.

Keywords: paradox, self, suffering, death, finitude/infinitude polarity, groundlessness.

How is it that I have followed Kierkegaard throughout my professional career and throughout my most intimate writings?

How is it that Kierkegaard has been my philosophical muse ever since that first day at Ohio University when, over a seven hour period, at a local MacDonald's restaurant (!), an exuberant graduate student introduced me to Kierkegaard's life and work?

It has to be more than the similarity of our names – That is "*Kierk*egaard" and me. (Although some call me "Captain *Kierk*egaard!" – echoing the television show "Star Trek".) Yet as I ponder it, I think my resonance with Kierkegaard has to do with the similarity of our experience with death. Death and its resultant shattering of a sense of self began very early for me with the tragically premature death of my brother of seven years, when I was barely three.

From there, and like Kierkegaard, I've always been fascinated by the contradictoriness and ruptures of our lives. This was illustrated in part by my increasing fascination with science fiction – with peculiar states of mind, strange worlds, and with new possi-

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bilities (including those of alien beings). For example, there was an early episode of the CBS television series *The Outer Limits* (1963) which made a particular impression on me as a budding youngster. In that episode, an electrified being from another galaxy became caught in the electromagnetic fields of a local radio tower. From there it began to amble toward the center of a small town. Just as in classic B movies of the past, many of the town citizens and the national guard gathered in the square in anticipation of the "monster." The citizens had their guns drawn, and the national guard readied canons. As the monster approached though something very atypical occurred: The towering monster looked down upon the scene, stood tall and said to the effect – "Put down your guns, go home, and contemplate the mysteries of the universe!" Now this was an object lesson for me on many levels but I think what stood out most was that life's paradoxes – the radically other and by implication death anxiety – does not have to be all bleak; they could on the other hand be a portal to another way of seeing, another way of being that has intriguing or even fascinating possibilities.

But it was in 1982 (I recall the exact year!!) when I was introduced to the work of Ernest Becker that my occupation with life's paradoxes began to soar. In Becker's *Denial of Death*[2] – which was a recasting of psychoanalysis in existential terms – I found a remarkable path to apply what I learned from philosophy to the therapy arena – which was my main interest.

Becker helped me to see the tremendous potential for both understanding and healing psychological suffering through the lens of Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death*[3], arguably his most penetrating work. I found this material so rich and so relevant to my work as a clinical psychologist and to my experience as a human being that I made it the cornerstone of my first book, *The Paradoxical Self: Toward an Understanding of Our Contradictory Nature*[4], as well as to just about everything else I have written since. It was also the foundation for my increasing kinship with Rollo May, who generously provided the Preface to *The Paradoxical Self*.

My basic thesis in *The Paradoxical Self* is that human experience can be understood on a continuum of finitude and infinitude, and that many of the so-called psychiatric disorders, from depression to obsessive compulsive disorder (on the "finitizing" side) to conduct disorders, narcissism, and mania (on the "infinitizing" side) can be explicated on this basis. Even some forms of substance abuse, such as drugs that sedate or on the other hand drugs that stimulate can also be viewed in such light.

I reframed the finitude/infinitude polarity as the "constrictive-expansive" continuum (which implies indefinite potentialities at either

2 E. Becker: *Denial of Death*, New York: Free Press 1973.

3 S. Kirkegaard: *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death*, transl. W. Lowrie, Princeton, N.-J.: Princeton University Press 1954. (Original works published in 1843 and 1849.)

4 K. Schneider: *The Paradoxical Self: Toward An Understanding of Our Contradictory Nature*, Buffalo, N.-Y.: Prometheus Press/Humanity Books 1990/1999.

extreme). I did this because it seemed to me more in keeping with a clinical rather than philosophical portrayal. That is, I found the polarities of constriction (drawing back and confining…) and expansion (bursting forth and extending…) more clinically and phenomenologically relevant to what I observed in myself and my practice, than the rather abstract conceptions of "finite and infinite" sides of self… although it's clear that Kierkegaard intended for his concepts to be phenomenologically, experience-near as well.

Through my personal and professional investigation, I found that this dialectic of constriction/expansion operated in a three-part model that I called *the Paradox Principle.*

The Paradox Principle is defined as follows: The human psyche is a constrictive/expansive continuum only degrees of which are conscious. Denial or avoidance of these polarities associates with extreme or polarized counter reactions (for example, "disorders," violence); whereas the encounter with, integration of, or coexistence with the polarities associates with more vital and dynamic living – a form of living that I've since termed the "fluid center"[5]. The fluid center is structured inclusiveness, pliability and constraint, and humility and boldness as context and circumstance demand. (It is no accident that the fluid center is akin to Kierkegaard's notions of "vital energies" and "self as synthesis").

Now this Paradox Principle – as a cursory perusal of my writing will show – pervades just about every major work I have published – from *The Paradoxical Self* to *Horror and the Holy*[6] *to my works on Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy*[7], *Existential Humanistic Therapy*[8], and my more recent writing on *The Rediscovery of Awe*[9] *and Awakening to Awe*[10] *to my latest volume The Polarized Mind*[11]. These are all reflections and applications of that basic Kierkegaardian problem of the finitizing and infinitizing self and its manifold relations to itself and the world. So you see, it's no mistake that I am present here – I owe a great deal to this man!

In my just published book *The Polarized Mind*, I show how the denial of the paradoxes and mysteries of life is not merely an individual problem but a harrowing cultural and social problem as well – indeed I see it as the self-induced "plague" of humanity, which we have a knack of

5 K. Schneider: *Rediscovery of awe: Splendor, mystery, and the fluid center of life*, St. Paul, MN: Paragon House 2004.

6 K. Schneider: *Horror and the Holy: Wisdom-Teachings of the Monster Tale*, Chicago: Open Court 2003.

7 K. Schneider: *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice*, New York: Routledge 2010.

8 K. Schneider & O. Krug: *Existential-Humanistic Therapy*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press 2010.

9 Schneider, *Rediscovery of awe*, op. cit.

10 K. Schneider: *Awakening to Awe: Personal Stories of Profound Transformation*, Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson 2009.

11 K. Schneider: *The Polarized Mind: Why It's Killing Us and What We Can Do About It*, Colorado Springs: University Professors Press 2013.

repeating over and over again. No generation, at least in my experience, seems to learn the lesson very well.

From the beginning of recorded time, people have been cutting off their paradoxical nature, and suffering horribly as a result. Consider, the Babylonian myth of the Enuma Elish, where the creatrix of the world, Tiamat and her husband Apsu create what they think is a perfect world order, only to have it upended and upset by their children. These children soon grow so rebellious that Tiamat's husband Apsu puts a contract out on one of them but before he can carry out his plan, he ends up getting killed by one of the children himself!

In essence, Apsu and Tiamat failed to adhere to the Paradox Principle, and by implication Kierkegaard's "self as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude;" on the other hand, what they did end up pursuing was a turning away from their paradoxical nature, a cutting off of their vulnerability, and an unintended self-collapse.

As recent studies in "terror management" show, the denial of one's vulnerability – or in the parlance of depth psychology, one's sense of groundlessness (insignificance, helplessness) before creation, tends to lead to overcompensatory strivings to do everything one can to assert significance, infallibility, and ultimately ironically self and other destruction. The denial is based on trauma, whether individual or cultural, in which one's raw relationship to existence is exposed without supports to deal with this exposure.

We see this pattern in leader after leader and culture after culture, following Babylonian myths, from ancient Greece to Rome, from the Crusades to the French Terror, from Napoleon to British colonialism, from Stalin to Hitler, to Mao, and many epochs and figures in between – as well as succeeding! The pattern seems to comprise a "perfect storm" of convergence between self-devaluing, brutalized leader and self-devaluing, brutalized culture, which then leads to tyranny (fascism, despotism, or totalitarianism) to compensate.

The whole crux of this polarization cycle is anticipated by Kierkegaard; indeed, I would go so far as to say that the whole crux of what we call today "psychopathology" is driven largely by the Kierkegaardian dynamics of groundlessness (infinitude), terror, and defense (or overidentification with one point of view to the utter exclusion of competing points of view, to deny the groundlessness). Think about how this operates in the oppressive judgmentalism of depression to avoid the risk of venturing out, the exacting pedantry of obsessive compulsion to repel the peril of lack of control, and the crippling guardedness of anxiety disorder to staunch the risk of standing out or being bigger in the world. Or on the other hand, consider the equally disabling polarizations against the groundlessness of dissipation and smallness – such as narcissism, conduct disorders, and certain forms of mania. In either case, the person becomes locked up in the prison of one-sidedness, terribly avoidant of the other side, which invariably associates with the abyss and bottomlessness, as our clinical patients so often remind us.

To put this in a theoretical form, I propose that most of our troubles as human beings are traceable to *our suspension in the groundlessness, the radical mystery of existence.* Again, think of how loss, disruption, illness, rejection, and abandonment open us to this raw truth of our human situation, and think of how devastating these dimensions can be in the absence of therapeutic intervention.

On the other hand, I would also propose, and following Kierkegaard's "knight of faith" and "truth as objective uncertainty held fast in the most personal passionate experience"[12] that most of our joys, breakthroughs, and liberations are also traceable to our suspension in the groundlessness of existence!

And this is where presence and the sense of awe, or the humility and wonder, sense of adventure toward living become so central to human vitality. I believe what Kierkegaard is saying, and Tillich, Rank, Becker, Laing and others have elaborated, is that by staying present to our sense of groundlessness (the "truth" or "angst" of the human situation), grappling with it, learning how to co-exist with and even revel in its many dimensions, we can become paradoxical selves; fluidly centered, many dimensional yet (ironically) grounded individuals – individuals who find "ground within the groundless." This is precisely what I feel I found following the tremendously important psychotherapy I received following my brother's death. I don't remember a thing that my analyst said to me, except what I do remember was his rock solid presence, which helped to ground me. I felt that he understood me at some profound level, had been there himself, and had survived and indeed thrived in the wake of it.

This grounding, bridging, or embracing of ostensibly contradictory sides of myself helped me to open to the "MORE" of my experience – beyond my paralyzing terrors. From there on, I was able to engage my terrors with a sense of growing intrigue and eventually fascination, and this, ultimately, led to an entire career journeying through the corridors of the unknown, stumbling upon and yet expanding and deepening in the face of my anxiety. Freedom is the flipside of anxiety[13], as Rollo May put it, and anxiety the flipside of freedom.

Recapitulating then, Kierkegaard, showed that most of our (psychological) troubles are traceable to our suspension in the groundlessness, the radical mystery of existence. Please take some time to meditate on this a moment. Reflect once again on great loss, on disruption or change, on illness and abuse. Consider how powerfully they associate powerfully to this groundlessness – and are precisely why our therapy clients speak to them with references like "black holes," "shatterings," and "bottomless pits" of their experience. This experience *is* in fact a partial state of *all* our experiences, of humanity's condition – and if you don't believe it, just consider how we're all suspended right now on this tiny ball whirling through the universe. We just don't think of that condi-

12 P. Tillich: *Kierkegaard's Existential Theology*, Part 2, (CD recording T577 123, *Paul Tillich Compact Disk Collection*), Richmond, VA: Union PSCE 1963.

13 R. May: *Freedom and Destiny*, New York: Norton 2008.

tion very much until we're traumatized, and then, more often than not, become panic-driven. But Kierkegaard recognized that this dis-ease is only a *part* of our relationship to existence; the other part of that relationship recognizes that groundlessness opens to choice, possibility, and transcendence. It opens to participation in the *opportunity* that a non-fixated, evolving universe affords.

This was also the great insight of existential thinkers such as Viktor Frankl[14], who found possibilities in the most depraved circumstances imaginable (the Nazi death camp) – and who set the bar thereby for all despairing people everywhere to potentially meet. And it was also the great revelation of Ernest Becker, the author of *The Denial of Death* – and the marvelous contemporary expositor of Kierkegaard, who on his deathbed was asked to speak about *what death means to him*? And he said in effect, "well it means giving myself over when there's nothing left to the tremendous creative energies of the cosmos, to be used by powers we don't understand, and to be used by such powers, even if we feel somewhat misused, is one of the most exhilarating experiences a person can have."

If there is a better illustration of Kierkegaard's "Knight of Faith," I'd like to know about it!

In closing, I think of Søren Kierkegaard similar to the way I think of William James[15] – as a seminal psychologist/philosopher of our past who is at one and the same time a seminal psychologist/philosopher of our future. His vision, like that of James', has barely begun to be tapped, is applicable to the broadest ranges of humanity, and has revolutionary implications for our day-to-lives; as lovers, leaders, functionaries, and those who will raise the next generation of our children. How are we going to respond to these challenges – as panic-driven robots? As ideologues and bullies? Or as pliable and disciplined mortals, flesh and blood creatures – knowing that one day we will dissipate, but also knowing just as adamantly that we are now living, that we have incredible resources for that living, and that our care and cultivation of those resources are the qualities that endure.

For the self as Kierkegaard reminds us, is a synthesis of finitude and infinitude that relates itself to itself and whose task is to become itself[16] – anything less, in my view, is less of a life.

14 V. Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*, Boston: Beacon Press 2006.
15 W. James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: Modern Library, 1902/1936.
16 Kirkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, op. cit.

THE HEALING RELATIONSHIP FOR WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION

Dalia Puidokiene[1], Juha Perttula[2]

Abstract

The prostitution phenomenon in Lithuania is related mainly to the issues of morality and free choice. From the existential approach, prostitution means the human existence of persons in prostitution appearing primarily as a highly narrowed realisation of the potential communication and relationship with others. A person who has experienced trauma like an act of prostitution becomes detached from his or her experiences. His or her emotions, then, become unrecognised, unacknowledged or unexpressed. Understood existentially, it is necessary for this person to search for who he or she is to fully experience his or her emotions in any life occurrence. This article is built on a study of the personal experiences of fifteen women working in prostitution, applying an existential approach through a heuristic research strategy. The study focused on obstacles the women faced growing up, on choices they made while deciding whether to disengage from prostitution or not and on the help they sought after being dehumanised and turned into objects for the sexual satisfaction of others. Our results indicate that women in prostitution do not outwardly reflect the emotions they experience and have trouble sensing themselves as they are. Further, the study showed how women in prostitution were unable to seek help without aid actively given by others. Meeting with help giver, and the quality of these meetings (establishing a trustworthy space), was crucial. In these supportive relationships, women working in prostitution developed their individuality, the key to their human existence.

Keywords: women working in prostitution, personal experiences, relationship, healing meeting, heuristic research.

Introduction

The issues regarding women working in prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation often gain significance only as a problem. Lithuanian society considers prostitution and women working in prostitution via two frameworks: morality and free choice. Therefore, reactions to prostitution or

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women working in prostitution constitute a mixed social response, including an insistence on punishment, apathy and an effort to control these women. This research is based on both practical and academic experience. The first author has six years of experience providing psychosocial services to victims of prostitution as well as victims of sexual trafficking. In 2012, she finished her doctoral dissertation at the University of Lapland, Finland, in which she gathered empirical data about prostitution in Lithuania from several sources, including fifteen open interviews with women working in prostitution.[3] The second author is an expert in existential-phenomenological methodology and served as the first author's thesis supervisor.

Generally, common problem-oriented discussions on these women's individualities, their experiences and the complexity of their situations are brushed aside; a human being, in this case a woman working in prostitution, is overlooked. This means that getting to know the women and their experiences is also brushed aside. Thus, a more profound understanding and the associated more effective resolutions to their essential problems are blocked out as well.

The conventional dichotomy of thinking about how a woman becomes a prostitute and the associated dominance of negative orientation are exemplified by the much-used categorisations of being "different", of having "lower intellect", of being "second-rate", of being in prostitution by her "own choice" and of "accepting her way of life". Such labelling is disturbing, but simultaneously, it inspires and encourages careful analysis of these women's personal experiences to understand their specific life patterns and to pursue answers regarding their goals in life. In practice, help to victims of prostitution and human trafficking is insufficient and encounters various obstacles worldwide.

The purpose of this study is not to deliberate the phenomenon of prostitution, but to examine these women's, who are existentially situated or have been situated in prostitution, experiences. When any effort is made to help victimised persons, the task is to grasp from where they can be 'found'. In other words, according to Kierkegaard, whenever there is a desire to actually take someone to a pre-defined place, the person has to be found where they are and then begin the journey from that place.[4] Therefore, to help women in prostitution, their experiences have to be discovered from the ground up by setting aside their covert personal and public masks. This gives us the chance to become familiar with their personal experiences and life actualities.

[3] D. Puidokiene: *Covert Codes of Women in Prostitution: Pathways for Recoring Roots After Trauma Interference*, Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis; 246. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press 2012.

[4] S. Kierkegaard: *Požiūrio taškas į mano autorinę veiklą*, trans. by J.Q. Pons. Vilnius: Baltos lankos 2006, 64.

Being a woman working in prostitution

The personal experiences of women in prostitution reveal their internal and external struggles in their efforts to overcome prostitution. The anxiety of loneliness causes disassociation from themselves as feeling, conscious people. Other obstacles include the consequences from the lack of self-confidence in their own abilities, experiencing violence, an inappropriate upbringing (in the women's own words), disappointments in personal relationships, hopelessness regarding future prospects, stigma about their occupation and not having anyone to talk about their difficulties.

All of these obstacles kept the women stuck right where they were. Herman notices that people who have experienced traumatic events are often independently motivated to talk about this in the hopes that opening up will give their suffering meaning and dignity.[5] It is true that these women were inclined to talk about their lives; however, they had trouble finding sincere 'listeners' who were prepared to accept the women as they were without preconceptions or judgment. The women frequently encountered others' negative views toward them and their unwillingness to listen to them. It was when people the women were close to had these perspectives that the women felt the most hurt. Moreover, the women took the blaming, the lack of attention, the deception, or those taking advantage of their existing situations as indicators that they should continue working as prostitutes. Thus, in many cases, the women made incorrect decisions because of their subjective (mis)interpretations.

The women suffered greatly from the lack of close relationships and the related shortage of support and understanding (or simply people's harsh rejection). Some of the women cited difficult economic conditions – not having a place to live or a means of making money – as obstacles to change. Further, not having information about where to get help limited the opportunity for change. The interviews with the women about their actual personal relationships confirmed one universal human truth: everyone needs someone to stand by them. It became evident that the women were inclined to talk about these painful experiences even when they claimed they did not want to. Kast tells how important it is for a person to experience identity, to express him or herself, to be an active agent in his or her life, to feel capable, to have an impact on someone and to have the desire to imagine and make these imaginings explicit to others.[6] All of these factors were relevant to the women's experiences.

The analysis of their childhood and adolescent life experiences revealed that what the women especially missed was the discovery and reinforcement of their own 'I' (establishing a sense of autonomy and the ability for self-expression). Consequently, the search for identity con-

5 J.L. Herman: *Trauma and Recovery*, New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group 1997, 239.

6 V. Kast: *Atsisveikinimas su aukos vaidmeniu: gyventi savo gyvenimą*, trans. by T.D. Šniūrevičienė, Vilnius: Dialogo kultūros institutas 2002.

tinued later into their lives, manifesting itself as an effort to have an impact on someone in order to understand themselves more clearly.

Pieper and Pieper assert that people who acquire 'inner unhappiness' in childhood may subconsciously foster an illusion in adulthood about their ability to control and govern everything. Such individuals may attach their need for inner security to various symbols as they seek inner well-being and defend their own essence.[7] The women who participated in this research obviously felt an inner urge to talk; above all, it was critical to them to be listened to and to be heard, to be 'seen', and even more, to be understood and accepted. In these conversations, they explored their identities and seemingly confirmed their meaningfulness, which was often lacking in their other relationships both past and present.

It was this urge that caused several participants, such as Zita, to admit that for a long time, she had wanted "to put all the wrongs done to me into words to someone". Vilė's words attested to her sense of suffering: "There was nobody who could offer advice or some sort of support back then. Nobody was there. You're alone so you do the best you know how". Living through such isolation from others creates conditions of aloneness or the anxiety of loneliness. Vilė's phrases clearly showed the total absence of close 'human contact' in her life. It became obvious that Vilė's current state reflected her earlier experiences about her neglected need for a close, intimate contact offering gentleness, care, concern and security.

Odeta expressed her anxiety and loneliness as a strong disappointment in people in general by shouting, 'PEOPLE, WHERE WERE ALL OF YOU WHEN I DIDN'T WANT TO LIVE ANY LONGER? When I hit bottom, when I NEEDED YOU SO MUCH! Where, where, where, where?' Meanwhile, Milda, who grew up in a foster home, described feeling lonely or being alone by encountering a comprehensive lack of support: "Nobody helps, you've got nothing, no relatives, no parents, nothing. Nobody will bring you anything, nobody will give you anything, nobody will help, you've got to go yourself". When Milda felt unloved, unneeded and devalued, there were several strategies available for her to adjust to life: superficiality, insincerity, aggressiveness, anger and thirst for revenge. Similar harmful actions are seen in Zita's outbursts toward men as a response to her past painful experiences: 'I don't have anything more to lose, I'm already sick. And I got infected. So I'm going to get even the same way. I hate men, they're perverted creatures. And if I infect somebody, it means I'm getting even for that, what they did to me'. Perhaps Zita was hiding her feelings of alienation, hopelessness and anxiety of loneliness behind these aggressive expressions. In our view, Moustakas is right when explaining that distancing from the self and

7 M. Pieper Heineman, W.J. Pieper: *Smart Love*, Massachusetts, Boston: The Harvard Common Press 1999.

self-denial may initiate feelings of loneliness, which is expressed as an undefined and disconcerting anxiety.[8]

The women's past personal experiences are clearly associated with the corresponding experiences in their later lives: the absence of close contacts, searching for caring attention and relationships that did not respond to their needs. Making new appropriate choices in life is a fragile task for these women because their past experiences remind them of how people responded to them in relationships. Even now, as adults, the women react to offers of help very sensitively and carefully. As one woman said, 'It's very important how and who is giving it'.

Thus, when the women worked as prostitutes and experienced various negative and depressing feelings – fear, guilt and inner hardship – they felt the desire to tell somebody about it. Julia stated, "There were times when I so wanted to do something like shout, something like pour out everything, that's inside… Mostly I wanted to talk to someone who would understand me, understand what it is, how I feel and there was something inside that I must tell him, after all he is my brother". Nonetheless, along with their desire to tell, they also felt doubt and great fear. Julia continued, "To talk about it realistically, what there was, it was tremendous fear". The women did not know, and could not be sure, if they would be understood or listened to. In Julia's experience, "I didn't know if anyone would understand me…" and "I wanted to, but I was scared".

It was central to the women not to be condemned or judged. They were desperate to sense acceptance and understanding in place of misunderstandings or arguments. Therefore, others' opinions and their outlooks on the women were significant. Irma stated: "The opinion of someone else was important to me … that I had not done anything bad". She wanted their opinions to refute her own self-accusations and her own negative view of herself. This was similar for Evelina, who stated, 'I felt somehow different'. To her, it seemed that every person knew everything about her, that they "see, know, that, well, they could tell a lot about me. People have a poor opinion of me: that I'm bad".

As the researchers, we found it meaningful that in several of the research participants' case (Bronė, Diana, Kotryna, Toma and Zita), even though they are "already prostitutes inside", are used to what they are and will continue to work as prostitutes, it was possible to sense their hope and yearning for different lives. The women's beliefs, like "it could be even worse", displayed their dissatisfaction with what they had to experience and what they do today. However, one woman asked, "Who can help?", concretely indicating the ambivalence between having the courage for change and the orientation to give the responsibility to others.

It appeared that all fifteen research participants, except Algė, drank alcohol, and only three of them – Algė, Renata and Irma – did not use drugs. We interpret this as follows: alcohol and narcotics were a means of

8 C.E. Moustakas: *Loneliness*, N. J., Englewood Cliffs: A Spectrum Book, Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1961.

temporary relief from their traumatic experiences. Five women (Bronė, Diana, Kotryna, Toma and Zita) were dependent on alcohol, narcotics or both. Two of the five, Toma and Zita, had AIDS. Our impression was that some of them denied their substance dependency. Six women (Bronė, Milda, Odeta, Vilė, Julia and Renata) had attempted suicide. It seems that, contrary to what they believed, using drugs and alcohol had complicated their existence even more.

Meeting help givers

Koestenbaum and Block state that human relationships can have a healing effect.[9] Meanwhile, as we perceive it, self-help generally based on interpretative presuppositions and general inauthentic know-how only helps sporadically. Kępiński claims the "best medicine from the growing wave of psychological traumas in our society is not a legal code but rather greater responsibility for our outlook on another person".[10] Obviously, these women found it equally valuable to experience help givers' positive, supportive and strengthening views toward them with sincere and unselfish motivations to help them.

For example, Irma told one such help giver about her relationship with her brother and her work experience at the striptease club. Irma intently watched the help giver's reactions (facial expressions and body language); Irma listened intently to the language the help giver used and the questions she asked. The help giver sensed how important her reactions were to Irma while using terms like "not normal", 'unacceptable' and 'impossible'. Her overall experience was that Irma was actively observing whether she accepted Irma with understanding or whether she judged and condemned Irma. Several times, Irma repeated how "The outlook of people always scares me". The help giver realised that the close relationship she had formed with Irma during an earlier meeting allowed Irma to disclose details about herself. In the previous meeting, the help giver had not been judgemental regarding what had happened to Irma or Irma's current situation; further, the help giver expressed empathy during their conversation. This provided the potential for self-confidence, because, in Irma's words, "It's important, the opinion of others is very important". Thus, treating Irma with understanding and acceptance was "kind of a little push forward". This type of positive interaction may strengthen the women's self-confidence, which can be applied to their relationships with new people.

While discussing dialogic associations between people and the depth of the "I-You" relation, Buber notes that these are not the sole associations. He describes the phenomenon as people having respect for one another, for their mutuality; they turn to face and experience

[9] P. Koestenbaum, P. Block: *Freedom and Accountability at Work: Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World*, CA, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, A Wiley Company 2001.

[10] A. Kępiński: *Gyvenimo ritmas*, trans. by K.A. Antanavičius, Vilnius: Vaga 2008, 207.

one another, and consequently, "a responsive and trusting echo from another manifests".[11]

Thus, we perceived that for these women, the experience of a true relationship was "healing through meeting", as Morgan-Williams calls it.[12] This was implied in Irma's experience of close relationships when she received help: she felt she had discovered something that had been missing since her childhood. Irma stated: 'Actually, there wasn't even any desire to leave the centre. In the beginning, when I had just arrived, there was fear, now there isn't any, now I feel that I've got a new family'. Milda also spoke openly about the authenticity of a person she met. Milda had not known anybody like this while she worked as a prostitute, when she was using narcotics, or even early in her life. Milda explained that 'At first, the centre's workers seemed strict to me, we started talking entirely like that, well, but later I noticed some sort of trueness'. Diana admitted she could learn from the way the help giver contacted her: "…I liked learning the way they interacted… I paid heed to certain words of theirs, in and of itself, what they said".

In a meeting with help givers, an opportunity arose for the women to form human relationships that were different than those they had previously known. This offered them the chance to get to know themselves and their unique qualities in a new way. As Tyson McCrea and Bulanda conclude, matters that lay dormant and unexpressed in words, and being unclear as they are, become explainable and even obvious through dialogic relationships.[13] The women's experiences attested that the value of meeting others, in this case the help givers was twofold: the quality of the relationship and the increase in their personal consciousness regarding what they were doing. Irma explains this well: "Giving that, this kind of first … step in understanding, why I'm dancing over there, was really a very great deal. It was a kind of support, so to me it was just ugh, when I left". She continued, "After those talks I also tried more to help myself". The meetings aimed at helping the women made them stronger, more self-confident via recognising their power and abilities, more determined to make changes and more capable of making decisions bearing personal importance.

Significant attachment

Morgan-Williams notes that a meeting between a client and an expert help provider can be challenging to both parties.[14] When at-

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11 M. Buber: *Dialogo principas II: Dialogas. Klausimas pavieniui. Tarpžmogiškumo pradai*, trans. and intr. by T. Sodeika. Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai 2001.

12 S. Morgan-Williams: *All Real Living Is Meeting*, in: S. du Plock, H.W. Cohn (eds) *Journal of the society for existential analysis*, 6.2: 76–96. London: The society for existential analysis 1995, 88.

13 K. Tyson McCrea, J.J. Bulanda: *Caregiving Heuristics: Valuable Practioner Knowledge on the Context of Managing Residential Care*, in: *Qualitative Social Work*, 2010, 9: 343–363.

14 Morgan-Williams, op. cit.

tempting to help a client, Tyson believes that a dialogue is a necessary and irreplaceable means of sensing and examining the client's current conditions.[15] A reflective dialogue between an employee and a client is one example of such a dialogue. This is especially true when the effort involves an adjustment and response to the client's expectations and goals or to other subjective states.

The experiences our participants shared illustrated how vitally significant sustainable, healing relationships were to their lives. Diana paralleled the close relationship she had with her grandmother during her childhood to the care she had received in a current healing relationship. Even now, such childhood memories were a source of joy. In Diana's words, "The most important of that, what grandmother did, was that, that she had concern. Well she used to love me. The way she knew how. She was my caregiver".

Irma discovered sincere, warm and friendly relations with the help centre employees. This type of relationship had previously been missing in her life: 'I got that, what I truly needed, which is inside, inside, it's what's inside, that was missing for me. And that is a great deal'. The relationship Diana created with her psychologist remained highly meaningful to her. Even now, Diana misses her:

> "I know I got attached… With her I associated the most openly. … She would ask a lot of things, even intimate, and generally all sorts. … She knew how to talk well. Well, she wanted that it would be good for a person. She would pull out, well, from deep down. And it wasn't very important about what kind of things, she would pull them out. … I miss her. It used to be about a half hour by phone. She was associated very warmly and that's it".

Obviously, it was the sincerity or authenticity that Diana felt during the healing relationship that helped her to disclosure herself, have heartfelt talks and satisfy her need for close contact and for being important to someone else.

Freire considers associations between people as being true when they interrelate with fundamental human values – faith, love and hope.[16] A person can begin searching for him or herself if a contact expresses these values; then, a favourable sphere is formed for comprehending the self and fostering consciousness. Evelina shared how important her brother's understanding and support were during the most difficult time in her life. This was after she was raped, felt lost, feared telling anyone about it and suffered feelings of guilt and shame. Apparently, at that time, it was enough for Evelina that one person, her brother, had noticed her changed state and realised something bad had happened. Evelina said, "Brother … kept asking our parents, what it is with me, why am I avoiding even him. … He returned one time and said – What is it with her? She's not eating anymore. Well our parents were quiet. … Well he understood me". Evelina explained this to be the reason why she still

15 K. Tyson: New *Foundations for Scientific Social and Behavioral Research: The Heuristic Paradigm*, USA, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon 1995.

16 P. Freire: *Kritinės sąmonės ugdymas*, Vilnius: Tyto alba 2000.

trusts her brother, and apparently, why it is enough to know that there is a person who cares about her without preconditions.

As Shulman notes, it is evident that communities, like family members, face difficulties in recognising and accepting problems.[17] Nevertheless, people who are suffering struggle in such a community or a family; they will have a hard time overcoming these problems on their own. Odeta shared her vital experience of a meaningful relationship with a social worker:

> "When I thought deeply, I understood what you are to me … you are – The beginning of my life. These are not ordinary words; here you have to feel it. When I learned to live with heart... I understood, that, words are lacking of the kind, which would pass on that, which I feel for you. That is an unearthly gratitude".

All these experiences imply the importance of the enduring relationships the women had with other significant people. Further, these experiences illustrate what the relationships were like and what made them important. In sum, the women valued relationships in which they did not feel judged, but instead were understood and accepted for who they were. In addition, mutually valuable relationships expressing sincerity and warmth and including the help givers' flexible behaviour regarding the women's needs were important. In these relationships, the women were able to disclose of themselves, have more trust in others and allow themselves to heal and to become stronger.

Kierkegaard calls this a position of service rather than of ruling, i. e., of being patient. The existential orientation in meeting women in prostitution called our attention to what was seemingly passed over, unseen or doubted, i. e., to what was in hiding.[18] Thus, we needed to explore and understand the personal experiences of these women from the existential life course perspective in order to stay unprejudiced. These women required sincere and caring attention, treating them as meaningful people. This attitude was the foundation for successfully helping the women become stronger, heal and regain the power that their trauma had destroyed.

Help as a source for self-control

Herman accents the most helpful feature in a help relation from an incest victim's testimony: 'Good therapists were those who really validated my experience and helped me to control my behaviour rather than trying to control me'.[19] In our research, Julia recalled a significant meeting with one police officer who had stressed the importance of seeking help at the centre used in this study. In Julia's words, "That was an officer, who

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17 L. Shulman: *The Skills of Helping: Individuals, Families and Groups*. 3rd ed., Boston University School of Social Work, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc. 1992.

18 Kierkegaard, op. cit., 65–69.

19 Herman, op. cit., 133.

directly named, that there is this centre where they can help me. He gave me the phone... Well in that sense he told me ... that I can call". His sincere, concrete advice provided the push she needed to take the first step toward changing her life. Julia explained, 'Probably what I remember, it was that single thing that he simply suggested, saying you simply stay awhile, stay awhile over there, have a talk and maybe you'll see that there is a different life, than, the one you're living'. As Julia recalled, she could no longer endure her pimp's deceit and abuse, so she phoned the same officer that asked her to go to the help centre he had mentioned. Julia remembered her unforgettable experience upon entering the centre:

> "My first impressions were those surroundings... They truly left a very good impression. It was very calm, very beautiful and I truly felt well ... like I landed... I don't know ... into Heaven somewhere that, where I could truly calm down. ... The best thing was that, that on that day I was free. For me ... for me it wasn't necessary, like every day, in the sense, to engage in prostitution. I simply didn't have to do that and I was glad for that, that at least on that day I didn't have to do that, which I could rest".

In a similar manner, Loreta, who wound up in the shelter where she experienced understanding, support and care from the employees, felt safe. As she said, "For me you know heaven appeared". The shelter was the first step in regaining control over her body and in establishing her self-confidence.

However, despite the women's positive experiences at the help centre, Julia shared what had bothered her. As she put it, the meetings with the centre's employees felt constant, endless and tiring, whereas she wanted the opposite – peace and quiet, rest and a chance to get away from people. Since her wish went unheard or unheeded, this annoyed her and interfered with her recovery. Moreover, later on, Julia again experienced painful disappointments with certain employees at the centre. She still felt their behaviour toward her was insulting and wounding. According to her, it caused confusion and a feeling of being lost more than anything else. Their behaviour was a source of grievance, annoyance and anger. The way Julia told it illustrated their unsuccessful help regarding self-control, which disrupted her from regaining inner balance and made her healing difficult. What follows is Julia's valuable, detailed description of her experience:

> "What was annoying was not only the employees' viewpoint of you like ... like at a prostitute, in other words, like at a second-rate person, who is somehow different, from the others. I'd understand it from the retorts and not from anyone's, from certain talks of the employees, actually even talking with me... I'd hear sometimes... Some certain words... It seemed to me, that it was about me. ... Well let's say at the time, when I was asked, don't you feel like a prostitute, in other words there... Walking around somewhere in town. ... Right then it was very painful to me. The same way, when let's say there was somebody talking about intimate things, it would be said that almost I knew best about some kind of sex or something more. Well that

> used to be disgusting, because I didn't used to want actually to feel like, like I used to feel with clients, actually like some kind of doll, some kind of product, which means nothing more. Simply a thing without anything, without feelings... A piece of trash, a second-rate, filthy person. I remember there was this situation ... that simply from gratitude. ... I simply wanted to put my arms around a person and say thank you, and [the person] seemed to pull away from me, like I would have been I don't know... Well some kind of dirty, some kind of stained. It was as though they were afraid even to touch me. The feeling was as though, as though the others around were such goodie-goodies and the kind without any sins, the kind completely righteous and good... Meanwhile I'm the only one here who is filthy and disgusting".

Julia's experience shows how help giver's attitudes and views toward a woman working in prostitution may or may not help. As van Deurzen notes, a help giver's purpose and focus must be directed at generating a non-controllable dialogic relationship for mutual interaction.[20] This is the only way to help a client regain her autonomy, to get back on her own feet and 'to discover her own centre of gravity' external to encouraging her "to lean on others".[21] That is why, for instance for Evelina, it was important to simply have someone there, someone who was attentive not only to what she said but to how she felt. In Evelina's words, "She listened to me ... she really listened, to every little word going so far as to manage somehow. She watched, what was happening to me, actually followed, and watched. That kind of a reaction from her was more acceptable to me, than, what should you rush in to doing".

For Silva, it was important to feel herself, her human 'I', which she had lost due to the long-term traumas, when entering into new relationships. In particular, being important to someone and going through those feelings knowing that someone cared about her are what permitted her to gain more power and self-confidence: "I was feeling like a person, that I am necessary to someone. Being with her I felt, that I have a close person, I felt, that I am needed, I felt, that I can go to someone for consolation, when it gets hard for me". Freire notes that people reach their meaningfulness by talking things out, and due to such self-disclosure, by verbalising everything that concerns them, including what is painful and important.[22] Odeta's comments about her new relationship with a help centre employee showed how vital a close and not re-defined contact was, not only now but for the future: "I know that I matter already by now, and I mattered, and I will matter".

Colombero reminds us that a meeting between people is incredibly complicated; it is an act that requires a great deal from everyone.[23] How-

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20 E. van Deurzen: *Everyday Mysteries: A handbook of existential psychotherapy*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2010, 186.

21 Ibid., 186.

22 Freire, op. cit.

23 G. Colombero: *Nuo žodžių į dialogą: psichologiniai asmenų tarpusavio komunikacijos aspektai*, trans. R. Paleckytė, Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio lei-

ever, only this type of relationship can regenerate matters of importance that a person has lost, possibly resulting in changing the quality of a person's life. Buber considers the meaning of a meeting to be solely a direct relationship, which he names by the word pair "I-You". He argues that only by means of such a meeting is it possible to sense one's true life, which contains "selection and choosing, passivity and activity".[24] For Buber, "There is no I in and of itself – there is always only I and the word pair, I-You-I-Thou".[25]

These women's personal experiences revealed what they considered to be healing relationships. They stressed that the help centre's environment was experientially safe: they could trust and disclose themselves there, could receive understanding and sympathy and did not feel any pressure or demands put on them. The help centre provided an environment that facilitated healing, giving the women the opportunity to make their own decisions about how to act. Five examples of this follow: "It's where attention is shown to me ... interact and talk to you openly and sincerely" (Diana). "She showed the kind of attention, that she understands ... she somehow tried to help me, so just for that, that was enough for me" (Evelina). "The last time, well, on the last days, when I was still with that fellow, when 'I was working', he was constantly asking me, is everything OK with me, am I not getting beaten, or am I not being harmed, because if something was bad for me, I could always call him" (Julia). "...Come, sit down we'll drink tea, that so stuck with me ... simply so, that I would live... The reason these words so stuck with me because, that ... from me nobody, no how, is demanding anything" (Irma). "If there is something lying heavy on my heart, I can say it, talk it out here with everyone" (Loreta).

Based on our study, we agree with Kierkegaard's claim that if one wants to truly lead another person to a defined place, first the person must be found where he or she is and then begin the journey from there.[26] This offers a starting point for any help giver working with stigmatised people. The help giver must consciously seek how, for example, women working in prostitution understand the whole course of their lives, regardless of whether it is acceptable to or corresponds with the help giver's views. It is probably not accidental that after Odeta completed her feedback, she wrote the following: 'Everything in this world has not two sides but considerably more! And there is more – only love will save the world'. Odeta was the first author's client for seven years. After Odeta read the completed doctoral dissertation, she wrote to the author in the author's capacity as a help giver:

> "Your help, your being and even your remaining quiet gifted me with life, hope and some kind of light. Indeed ... it was unbelievably important to see and feel that you understand me and that you were truly concerned

diniai 2004.

24 M. Buber: *Dialogo principas I: Aš ir Tu*, trans. and intr. T. Sodeika, Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai 1998, 80.

25 Ibid., 70.

26 Kierkegaard, op. cit., 64.

about me. Imagine, right now I feel fortunate. NOW, right at this moment, even though the circumstances of this day are really not all that great. But, everything you wrote is truly so; I cannot add anything to it nor take anything away. Everything was like that. Now I feel so happy and I remember that time. But, you know what? That day, when you came over to that psychologist, I had already decided never to attend anywhere anymore and, all in all, disappear from... Oh God, I remember how you never left me for a single second. And how we rode over on top of the hill [she called the hospital] and I thought you wanted to shut me up in the psycho house. Realistically the distrust was 100 percent".

This quote displays the value of the type of close, healing relationship that is so needed by these women, and how the satisfaction of this need may lead to post-traumatic healing. For change to occur in a person's life, Herman believes that "The principle of restoring human connection and agency remains central to the recovery process and no technical therapeutic advance is likely to replace it".[27]

Our results suggest that the women can reorganise and change their lives and heal and regain the power and control they lost by being in conditions conducive to self-disclosure, mutual trust, friendship, safety and understanding from others. Colombero highlights the significance and meaning of how to be with others or to be for them when referring to dialogic relationships. There is no room for indifference, formality or casual interactions in such relationships; instead, the women exhibit happiness at being together with the help giver, express themselves to others and show devotion to their help givers by living for others.[28]

Conclusion

The personal experiences of the women working in prostitution revealed the complexity and diversity of the difficulties they had to face. Those who had attempted to overcome prostitution, and some who were still engaged in prostitution, experienced loneliness, anxiety and a lack of self-confidence in their own abilities. These experiences were related, according to them, to the stigma they carried from the abuse they suffered earlier in their lives, which for some of them continued up to this day. Additional causes for not disengaging from prostitution were feelings of hopelessness regarding their future lives and not having close relationships that provided support or the chance to talk about their depressive feelings.

The results revealed that the consequences from their wide-ranging, early, harmful and traumatic experiences persisted to the present day. The women found it difficult to disengage from prostitution on their own, or, once disengaged, to arrange their lives autonomously. As they attempted to overcome these struggles, they lacked relationships that provided support, responsiveness and strength. They faced others' in-

27 Herman, op. cit., 241.
28 Colombero, op. cit.

ability to hear them out and understand them. Since they did not receive the help they needed from other people or their communities, and lacked information about possible help, they organised their lives on their own. The typical result was to go on living as they did the main feature of which was mixed, unresolved and pessimistic experiences. Whether still in prostitution or not, all of the women felt the need to be heard, understood and accepted. This is the same wish they reportedly had since they were young. These women repeatedly experienced judgemental or evaluative behaviour, betrayal, rejection and neglect from people they were close to throughout their lives. Due to this, they continued to distrust others and fear self-disclosure. Since they sensed their vulnerability, they reacted to offers of help very carefully and with great distrust; they were more likely to reject help than to accept it.

In fact, all fifteen women participating in our research had gone through a period in their lives when they were unprepared to accept any sort of help they were offered. The women expressed this rejection multiple ways: keeping their work in prostitution a secret, fearing that disclosure would lead to devaluation and rejection; disbelieving in the possibility of help; reconciling themselves with the existing situation; not wanting to change anything and withdrawing into themselves. Consequently, they ignored offers of help, claiming they had already reconciled with their existing situations and had no desire to change anything.

The results suggest that working in prostitution may be a way of compensating for unmet needs from earlier in their lives. By working in prostitution, a woman may confirm her own meaningfulness and power; however, every woman felt powerless and hopeless when seeking help. This was true even when they attempted to think about resisting their exploitation, fearing what would happen next. In most cases, the women's efforts to seek help and the frequent instances of facing no response ended in disappointment. Nonetheless, there were some successful life stories. Overall, women working in prostitution may use a new, helping relationship to choose a new path.

To conclude, we found that the most important interactions women working in prostitution had were based on sincere and true relationships. These relationships did not place any demands on the women, and they helped them acknowledge their painful experiences. Meetings with help centre employees fulfilled their need to be heard about what was important to them, what they lacked or where their pain lay. Disclosing themselves was possible only if there was trust. The women could realise life changes when they felt they were in control of their situations and could make their own decisions, whereas behaving well according to any external 'good hopes' did not promote change in the women's lives. The help givers' patience and sincere attention encouraged the women to seek help, regain strength and heal.

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Topic of the Issue

TechnoLogos:
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The second half of the 20th century started the count of a special phase in the development of the civilized world, connected with a parallel revolutionary development of bio- and information technologies. The growing importance of scientific technologies for such areas of human life as *communication* and *health* has lead to the unprecedented convergence of science and daily life. The result of these processes is not only the rise of the individual competences (be it a "user" or viewer/listener in the former case, or the patient/customer – in the latter), but the reshaping of the sociality itself, the emergence of new cultural practices, as well as the transformation of personal experience of identity.

Social effects of the latest bio- and information technologies created a problem field in relation to which the traditional apocalyptic approach in covering "a question of technology" (from Heidegger and Frankfurt school to the Roman club members) showed its fundamental disparity. The sweeping extension of man's capacities, offered by new technologies (through optimization and "post-human" upgrading of "human nature", the enrichment of perceptual and communicative experience, creation of virtual communities and stimulation of new cognitive skills) called into question a validity of basic modern ideas of human identity, the principles of socialization and the conditions of meaning production.

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1. S. Toulmin: *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 31.
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6. Toulmin, op. cit., 32.
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9. Там же, 78.